

## Mold: Frequently Asked Questions



### What is Mold?

Mold is a type of fungus that can be found indoors and outdoors. Mold creates tiny spores to reproduce. Spores are like tiny seeds that allow the mold to spread and grow.

Mold can enter your home through open doorways, windows, vents, and heating and air conditioning systems. Mold in the air outside can also attach itself to clothing, shoes, bags, and pets can and be carried indoors.

### What does mold need to grow?

In order for mold to grow it needs:

- 1) **Moisture** which can come from leaks in roofs, windows, or pipes, or where there has been flooding, steam or humidity build up in kitchens/bathrooms with poor fan ventilation
- 2) **Nutrition Source** such as paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles, and wood products. Mold can also grow in dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation, drywall, carpet, fabric, and upholstery.

### Should I be concerned about my health if exposed to mold?

We are all exposed to some amount of mold every day. Not everyone is sensitive to or bothered by mold. Over time, exposure to active mold spores can cause or worsen health problems especially for infants/young children, the elderly, persons with weak immune systems (for example, people with HIV infection, chemotherapy patients, organ transplant recipients), persons with allergies, asthmatics, and persons with chronic respiratory conditions.

Symptoms of mold sensitivity include:

- Upper respiratory (nose and throat) symptoms
- Eye irritation
- Skin irritation
- Coughing
- Wheezing/asthma symptoms

EHD recommends that you check with your doctor if you suspect a sensitivity to mold.

### Should I test for mold?

**No Federal, State of New Mexico or City codes exist defining or regulating the limits of mold. Therefore, the City's assistance with mold problems is limited.**

**The City of Albuquerque does not test, clean, or conduct environmental health assessments for mold.** For testing assessments and/or clean-up, check local "yellow pages" under Laboratories-Analytical, Environmental Testing, or Mold Inspection. Please note that the

commonly used testing methods are limited in what they can detect and measure. Testing for mold is not the same as testing for “mycotoxins”, toxic substances produced by some molds which may harm a person.

### **How I can I tell if I have a mold problem at home?**

Investigate don't test. The most practical way to find a mold problem is by using your eyes to look for mold growth and by using your nose to locate the source of a suspicious odor. If you see mold or if there is an earthy or musty smell, you should assume a mold problem exists. Other clues are signs of excess moisture or the worsening of allergy-like symptoms.

- Look for visible mold growth (may appear cottony, velvety, granular, or leathery and have varied colors of white, gray, brown, black, yellow, green). Mold often appears as discoloration, staining, or fuzzy growth on the surface of building materials or furnishings. When mold is visible, testing is not recommended.
- Search areas with noticeable mold odors.
- Look for signs of excess moisture or water damage. Look for water leaks, standing water, water stains, and condensation problems. For example, do you see any watermarks or discoloration on walls, ceilings, carpet, woodwork or other building materials?
- Search behind and underneath materials carpet and pad, wallpaper, vinyl flooring, sink cabinets, furniture, or stored items (especially things placed near outside walls or on cold floors). Sometimes destructive techniques may be needed to inspect and clean enclosed spaces where mold and moisture are hidden; for example, opening up a section of the wall.

**Fix any leaks or other water problems first. Mold will not grow without moisture!**

**If you are the tenant of a rental property and have a problem with an ongoing uncorrected water leak, please call 311 to report the uncorrected leak to Code Enforcement.**

There are no legal requirements specific to mold in most residential settings. However, New Mexico law (New Mexico Statutes, Chapter 47, Article 8, Owner-Resident Relations)) requires that a landlord must provide an apartment that is habitable and in reasonable repair. If an apartment becomes uninhabitable, the landlord has violated or breached the lease.

### **What Are My Options If The Owner Refuses To Help?**

**If you are the current tenant of a rental property, do not have an active leak but are experiencing an unresolved mold problem, follow these steps:**

- 1) Submit a written notice of the problem to the property owner or manager and allow at least 3 days for a response.
- 2) If after submitting written notice and allowing a reasonable response time you are unsatisfied with the owner or manager response, please call 311 to report the problem. You should try to document the problem with letters, photographs, evidence of health problems, and any other documentation that would help the case.

### **Resources**

For more information on mold, please visit:

City of Albuquerque, Environmental Health Department

[www.cabq.gov/envhealth](http://www.cabq.gov/envhealth)

New Mexico Department of Health  
<http://nmhealth.org/about/erd/eheb/mp/>

Minnesota Department of Health, Environmental Health Division  
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mold/index.html>

United States Environmental Protection Agency  
<http://www.epa.gov/mold/>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mold/>

**Legal Resources:**

Law Help New Mexico/New Mexico Legal Aid  
<http://www.lawhelpnewmexico.org/?q=content/new-mexico-renters-guide-english>

City of Albuquerque, Building Codes  
<http://www.cabq.gov/planning/planning-regulations-and-policies/building-codes/>

New Mexico Attorney General's Office  
<http://www.nmag.gov/consumer/for-students/renter-s-guide>



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