



Mold Fact Sheet



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.

Mold Growth

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.

Health Concerns

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

The Environmental Health Department recommends that you check with your doctor if you suspect a sensitivity to mold.

Mold Testing

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.

Mold in Homes

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.

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 the New Mexico Landlord Tenant Hotline at 505-930-5666 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.

Mold Clean-up and Removal

To clean up and remove indoor mold growth, follow steps 1-6 as they apply to your home.

- 1) Identify and Fix the Moisture Problem
- 2) Begin Drying All Wet Materials
- 3) Remove and Dispose of Mold Contaminated Materials
- 4) Clean Surfaces
- 5) Disinfect Surfaces - optional
- 6) Remain on Mold Alert

Identify and Fix the Moisture Problem - the most important step in solving a mold problem is to identify and correct the moisture source(s) that allowed the growth in the first place. Common indoor moisture sources include:

- Flooding
- Condensation (caused by indoor humidity that is too high or surfaces that are too cold)
- Roof and plumbing leaks
- Firewood stored indoors
- Humidifier use
- Inadequate venting of kitchen and bath humidity
- Failure to vent clothes dryer exhaust outdoors (including electric dryers)
- Clothes line drying indoors

To keep indoor surfaces as dry as possible, try to maintain the home's relative humidity between 20-40 percent in the winter and less than 60 percent the rest of the year.

Begin Drying All Wet Materials - as soon as possible after becoming wet. For severe moisture problems, use fans and dehumidifiers and move wet items away from walls and off floors.

Remove and Dispose of Mold Contaminated Materials - items which have absorbed moisture (porous materials) and which have mold growing on them need to be removed, bagged and thrown out. Such materials may include sheet rock, insulation, plaster, carpet/carpet pad, ceiling tiles, wood products (other than solid wood), and paper products.

Take Steps to Protect Yourself - the amount of mold particles in air can increase greatly when mold is disturbed. Consider using protective equipment when handling or working around mold contaminated materials. The following equipment can help minimize exposure to mold:

- Rubber gloves
- Eye goggles
- Outer clothing (long sleeves and long pants) that can be easily removed in the work area and laundered or discarded
- At a minimum, you should use an N95 mask

Where possible, contain all moldy materials in plastic (bags or sheets) before carrying through the home. Hang plastic sheeting to separate the work area from the rest of the home. Cover vents in the work area.

Place fans in windows of work area to pull contaminated air out of the work area and exhaust it to the outdoors. Remove outer layer of work clothing in the work area and wash separately or bag. Damp clean the entire work area to pick up settled mold spores in dust.

Clean Surfaces - surface mold growing on non-porous or semi-porous materials such as hard plastic, concrete, glass, metal, and solid wood can usually be cleaned.

Thoroughly scrub all contaminated surfaces using a stiff brush, hot water and a non-ammonia soap/detergent or commercial cleaner.

Collect excess cleaning liquid with a wet/dry vacuum, mop or sponge

Rinse area with clean water and collect excess rinse water.

Disinfect Surfaces (if desired) - after cleaning has removed all visible mold and other soiling from contaminated surfaces, a disinfectant may be used to kill mold missed by the cleaning. In the case of sewage contamination, disinfection is strongly suggested.

Mix 1/4 to 1/2 cup bleach per gallon of water and apply to surfaces where mold growth was visible before cleaning. Apply the solution with a sponge or by other methods that do not over saturate or flood the surface area. Collect any run-off of bleach solution with a clean and filtered wet/dry vacuum, sponge or mop. However, do not rinse or wipe the bleach solution off the areas being treated -- allow it to dry on the surface. Always handle bleach with caution. ***Never mix bleach with ammonia***

Remain on MOLD ALERT - Continue looking for signs of moisture problems or return of mold growth. If mold returns, repeat cleaning steps and consider using a stronger solution to disinfect the area again. Regrowth may signal that the material should be removed or that moisture is not yet controlled.

If you choose to hire a contractor (or other professional service provider) to do the cleanup, make sure the contractor has experience cleaning up mold and check references.

You may contact the New Mexico Regulation and Licensing Department's website for information about state licensing requirements for contractors in New Mexico: <http://www.rld.state.nm.us>

Prevention Measures

Remember the key to mold control is moisture control. Following these suggestions can help prevent future mold issues:

- Repair any water leaks
- Maintain a low relative humidity
- Use exhaust fans when cooking, washing dishes, showering, and laundering
- Regularly inspect ventilation systems, roofs, foundations, windows, and plumbing fixtures for new leaks

Resources

For more information on mold, please visit:

City of Albuquerque, Building Codes

<http://www.cabq.gov/planning/planning-regulations-and-policies/building-codes/>

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>

Landlord/Tenant Laws, Information and Resources

<https://www.santafenm.gov/landlordtenant>

New Mexico Attorney General's Office

<http://www.nmag.gov/consumer-complaint-instructions.aspx>