

All Canadian federal and provincial occupational health and safety and public health agencies consider mould growth inside buildings to be a risk factor for health problems. Health Canada recommends that mould growth be prevented by appropriate and timely control of moisture sources and that mould growth is removed using established remediation protocols (policies and procedures).

WHAT IS MOULD?

Mould is the common word for any fungus that grows on wood or damp materials. They release spores into the air which are small enough that people can breathe them in. In a home or building, moulds and fungi are usually found growing on wood, drywall, fabric, wallpaper, ceiling tiles, carpeting, etc.

To grow, mould needs moisture and a material it can live on. In buildings, moisture is often present as the result of:

- flooding,
- leaks in the roof or plumbing,
- sealed buildings that do not allow excess moisture to escape,
- sources such as cooking facilities, showers, etc., or excess humidity.

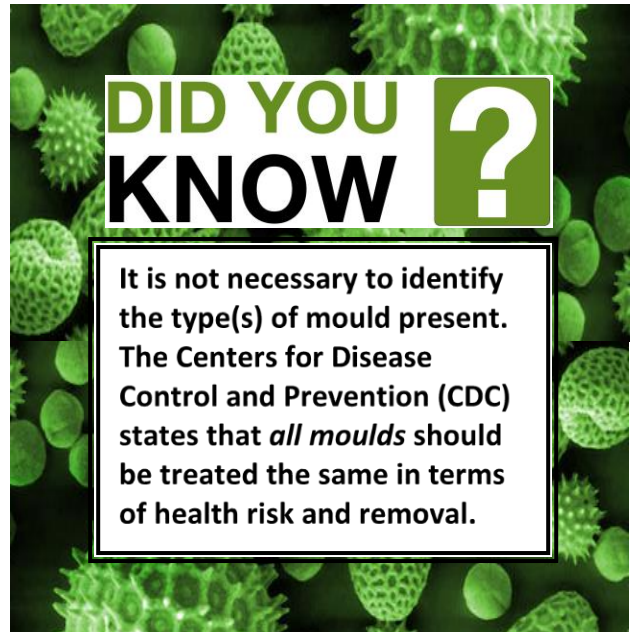
HEALTH RISKS

Breathing in large amounts of mould spores and the by-products they produce can negatively impact your health. For most people, exposure to mould doesn't cause any immediate or significant health effects. However, if a person has a weakened immune system, the health effects can be severe.

Some moulds are infectious (pathogenic) and others produce chemical by-products or mycotoxins (toxigenic agents).

Common health effects include:

- eye, nose and throat irritation
- coughing and mucous (phlegm) build-up
- wheezing and shortness of breath
- worsening of asthma symptoms
- other allergic reactions



PREVENTION

A major cause of mould growth is poor ventilation, and common problem areas include kitchens, bathrooms and basements. Prevent mould from growing by making sure you:

- **Look for damp spots in your house:** basements, closets, window sills, roofs, sinks, tubs
- **Fix damp spots right away:** Repair any water leaks right away and clean immediately after any flood.
- **Use fans:** Use kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans when cooking or showering.
- **Vent outside:** Make sure clothes dryer, stove, kitchen and bathroom fans all vent outside.
- **Seal tubs and sinks:** Make sure the seal is tight so water doesn't leak into the walls.
- **Throw out basement clutter:** Cardboard boxes and old clothes are great places for mould to grow.
- **Keep your home well ventilated:** Open windows in dry weather or use fans as needed.
- **Reduce humidity:** Keep humidity low, about 50% in summer and 30% in colder weather.
- **Clean:** Clean and disinfect anything that holds water (humidifiers, de-humidifiers, air conditioners).

How Should I Clean Up Mould?

If the contaminated surface is small to moderate:

- Wear safety glasses, a disposable dust mask, and rubber gloves.
- Consider isolating the area by taping plastic sheeting to the walls and ceiling to prevent the spread of mould particles.
- Vacuum the area with a high-efficiency particulate air filter (HEPA) vacuum cleaner before and after cleaning.
- Clean the mould by using water and dish detergent. When cleaning drywall, use only a damp cloth.
- Sensitive people should not be in the same room during the work and should leave the house until the mould is removed.



If the affected area is large:

- Have appropriate training in disposal and removal of biological contamination (contact a professional).
- Wear a HEPA respirator plus appropriate glove and eye protection, disposable protective clothes, head cover and shoes.
- Isolate the area from the rest of the working space with plastic sheeting and by sealing ventilation ducts and other openings.



- ★ Once clean-up is done, be sure to fix the underlying cause (water damage, too much humidity or not enough ventilation) to prevent more mould from growing again.

SOURCES: CCOHS, WorkSafeBC, Government of Canada, Ottawa Citizen