



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec
Environmental Health Association of Québec

ECO-JOURNAL

January 2022

Bhavini Patel

Part II – How to Manage Mold

Mold is a potential health problem that is not well-known in the public domain. However, its effects on our health are large as discussed in Part I of this article series. Besides your health, mold can also affect the structures of your house, causing rotting walls, for instance. Thus, it is important to get rid of mold safely and without delay.

The following article will discuss how mold can be detected, where it is often found, and how it can be removed and cleaned out of your home.

Detecting Mold

The first step in mold detection is to understand what mold looks like (OSHA, 2005). Unfortunately, mold can be difficult to spot because it often looks like dust or dirt and is typically hidden in hard-to-see spots of your home that are neglected when cleaning. These spots include the inside of walls, ceilings, vents, under sinks, behind shower heads, and essentially, any space that is exposed to humidity, darkness, and leaks (e.g., basements).

One sure way of detecting the presence of a mold problem in your home is to have professionals inspect your house. Alternatively, you may look for mold yourself and test using mold detection kits; however, you should note that these kits may require lab analysis as they do not identify mold type accurately nor do they identify the cause of mold growth.

If you do not have the means to hire professionals or to buy mold detection kits, you can skip to inspecting your house visually and cleaning any areas that appears dirty.

- Look at your walls and notice if there is any discoloration or dirty spots.
- Keep in mind that mold can come in different colors, and some might be imperceptible especially on walls that are painted a color other than white.
- A musty odor.

However, if the visible mold is spread over a significant surface, or if you suspect mold in the walls, it is necessary to call in a professional for safe removal.





Areas Where Mold Often Hides

- Below sinks
- Behind refrigerator
- Behind or under washing/drying machines
- Behind the toilet
- Under carpets that are exposed to moisture
- In shower corners, behind showerheads
- In ventilation ducts
- Around windows
- Behind drywall that contains plumbing
- In attic walls and corners
- In basement ceiling and corners
- Water marks on walls or ceilings
- In places that were previously exposed to flooding

Important: When looking for mold, it is important to wear a mask and eye protection to prevent mold from entering your body and causing adverse reactions.

Mold Prevention Tips

1. Proper ventilation throughout the house including the basement and use fans in the kitchen and bathroom. Get a dehumidifier to reduce overall moisture levels in your home.
2. Keep the shower and bath dry after use.
3. Pick up spills immediately. Watch out for areas that are susceptible to flooding. Seal properly.
4. Do not use carpeting in areas exposed to moisture.
5. Mold will begin to grow on a damp surface within 24 to 48 hours. Therefore, any leak or water damage must be opened up and thoroughly dried within 48 hours if you want to prevent mold growth.
6. Clean the air ducts once a year, making sure not to allow the use of any pesticides or antibacterials. Instead, choose natural options such as products with Thyme oil.
7. Wipe condensation off the windows.
8. Make sure outdoors water systems and downspouts are pointed away from your home.

Cleaning Tips

Before Cleaning: Preparations:



- ✚ **Protect yourself.** Wear a mask (N-95), eyewear, full-length clothing (to discard after cleaning), and gloves.
- ✚ **Eliminate moisture and leak sources.** Before even cleaning out mold, it is important to prevent its re-growth from moisture and leaks. Here are some solutions:
 - Identify and repair the source of the leak that is causing the mold growth (roof, through the wall, leaks in plumbing, etc.). You may need assistance from a professional to do this.
 - Repair caulking on windows to prevent leaks.
 - Ensure that caulking in the bathroom is well done and is not lifting away from a surface.
- ✚ **Ventilate the working space.** Ensure proper ventilation, but make sure there are no wind currents to blow the mold around while cleaning.
- ✚ **Plan for trash.** Keep a trash bag or boxes with you to throw away items that are severely tainted with mold, and all items used for cleaning the mold.

Cleaning

- ✚ Use a scrubbing brush or rag to scrub away mold from wall with water and soap (or any natural detergent without any harmful additives). Make sure you are not creating dust in this process, or the mold will get airborne and spread.
 - Use a rag on surfaces that are porous (e.g., drywall).
 - Remember all items used to clean the mold must be discarded in the garbage outside the house.
- ✚ Avoid toxic cleaning products, and instead use natural mold cleaners (Wilson et al., 2004).
 - Undiluted white vinegar can be used on most hard and non-porous surfaces.
 - Use natural cleaning products that contain Thyme oil.
 - Mix soap/natural detergent with water. Put it in a spray bottle.

After Cleaning

- ✚ Make sure to completely dry out the places you clean. Install fans to speed the process. If a professional had to open the walls, make sure that the interior is dried very well before the walls are closed up.
- ✚ If any leaks happen in the future, fix them immediately.
- ✚ Regularly use the exhaust fan and dehumidifier when moisture levels are high – e.g., during and after a shower, or on a humid summer day.



References

Anonymous. (2005). Mold Fact Sheet. *Occupational Safety and Health Administration*. [PDF]

Wilson, S. C., Brasel, T. L., Carriker, C. G., Fortenberry, G. D., Fogle, M. R., Martin, J. M., ... & Straus, D. C. (2004). An investigation into techniques for cleaning mold-contaminated home contents. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene*, 1(7), 442-447.