

# Tips for a mold-free home

Mold, mildew, and other toxic organisms commonly occur in areas that show evidence of, or have the potential for, moisture intrusion and/or inadequate ventilation. Any area or item exhibiting such conditions can be a health hazard to some people, particularly children; pregnant women; the elderly; those having asthma, allergies, or other breathing condition; and those whose immune systems are compromised (HIV, cancer patients on chemotherapy, and people who have recently had surgery). People who are sensitive or allergic to mold may experience stuffy nose, watery eyes, wheezing, or skin irritation, and may have difficulty breathing. If you have any similar conditions that cannot be explained, first see your doctor or other health care provider as soon as possible.



Most of us know what mold looks like and smells like. Thousands of different types of mold occur naturally throughout the world, but apparently only a few of them cause health problems. Mold spores move naturally through the air and can be found in every area of the home; in fact, you are breathing it as you are reading this. It grows on most building materials as long as the requisite moisture is present.

The key to controlling mold is controlling moisture: reduce moisture (keep the interior of your house dry and the humidity level below 45%), remove visible signs of mold, and disinfect surfaces. If a water invasion occurs, eliminate the water source and dry, repair, and/or replace any wet areas and items as quickly as possible. Because mold requires a high moisture content in order to grow and thrive, it should not pose problems in a desert environment such as San Diego's. You can prevent mold from growing in your home and affecting your health by inspecting your home on a regular basis (monthly at a minimum) for water and drainage leaks. If you see mold or smell musty odors, chances are great that you have mold growing in your home. First, seek out and correct the problems that are providing the mold with the moisture that it needs to grow. Inspect the water and drainage pipes, valves, and connections under your sinks for leaks and have any leaks repaired immediately by a qualified plumber. Inspect around sink basins, bathtubs, and shower stalls for deteriorated grouting or caulking where water can penetrate into the structure's walls and framing, allowing mold to thrive in those spaces. After using your shower or bathtub, use your exhaust fans or open the windows located in the bathrooms to help prevent a build-up of moisture in those areas.



While you can clean up mold yourself, understand that there is a significant difference in the approach used for small amounts of mold in a sink cabinet and a large, contaminated area, such as mold growing in walls. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a homeowner wearing personal protective equipment may handle small cleanup areas. For larger areas, the EPA advises hiring an experienced, professional contractor. Any home that has sustained major water damage or flooding needs to be inspected by a qualified water loss specialist.

If you decide to take on the task yourself, remember that you will be exposed to potentially toxic mold and strong detergents and disinfectants. Before you decide to do it yourself, however, read visit the web site for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency , and read their guide, "A Brief Guide to Mold and Moisture in Your Home" (<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html>).