

NAVY REGION NORTHWEST Housing

WHAT IS MOLD?

Molds are a type of fungus found just about everywhere - on plants, mulch and even foods. They are beneficial to the environment because they break down dead material. Certain types of mold have proven extremely valuable in the production of antibiotics. Molds produce spores, very tiny and lightweight reproductive bodies that travel easily through the air. However, when molds are present in large numbers, they may cause symptoms in some people that are similar to allergies caused by plant pollens.

HOW DOES MOLD GROW?

In order to grow, mold needs oxygen, food and water. Oxygen is in air, and almost anything can be a food source. Examples include most everything in your house: cellulose materials (like insulation, paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles and wood), carpet, dust, paint, wallpaper, wallboard and even furniture. It's the water that's usually missing. However, even a small amount of moisture that stays in your house may be enough to let the mold spores grow. It can come from leaking pipes, roofs or windows, flooding, overflows from the washing machine or dishwasher, humidifiers, or improperly vented appliances.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Anyone experiencing hay fever-like allergies or who has been medically diagnosed with allergies may want to:

- Use allergen resistant covers for mattresses and pillows.
- Clean your house with a HEPA-filtered vacuum cleaner. This will minimize allergens released to the air during cleaning.
- Periodically change the air filters for your air conditioner and indoor ventilation system.

WHO SHOULD I CALL IF I SUSPECT A MOLD PROBLEM IN MY HOUSE?

Contact your neighborhood or property manager. If you need additional guidance or are not satisfied with the resolution, contact your NW Housing Services Center at 1-800-876-7022.

If you suspect health problems, contact your health care provider or call the base Occupational Health Clinic.

More Information on Mold:

EPA's Mold, Moisture & Your Home

www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html

CDC's Mold in the Environment

www.cdc.gov/mold/faqs.htm

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MOLD

*Housing
Services
Center*

**FOR SAILORS
AND FAMILIES**

1.800.876.7022

NBK-HOUSING@NAVYLIFEPNW.COM

EVERETT-HOUSING@NAVYLIFEPNW.COM

WHIDBEY-HOUSING@NAVYLIFEPNW.COM

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WHIDBEY-HOUSING@NAVYLIFEPNW.COM**

CAN MOLD AFFECT MY HEALTH?

Molds rarely affect healthy people. In fact, we are exposed to molds and spores every day. If mold is growing on a surface, spores may spread into the air where they can be inhaled. We can also ingest (eat) spores. Some people who ingest or inhale a large number of spores may have health effects. For example, naturally occurring molds in outside air are associated with allergies in some adults and children, often producing symptoms like hay fever. Hay fever-like reactions are common and include:

- Nasal and sinus congestion
- Eye irritation (burning, watery, or reddened eyes)
- Dry cough
- Nose or throat irritation
- Skin rashes
- Respiratory problems like wheezing, difficulty breathing and shortness of breath, especially in individuals with chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma

In very rare and extreme cases, some people report headaches, memory problems, mood swings, nosebleeds, body aches and pains, and fevers.

Also, some people are more sensitive to molds than others, including:

- Infants and children
- Elderly people
- Immune compromised patients (such as people with HIV infection, cancer, liver disease, or those receiving chemotherapy)
- Individuals with existing respiratory conditions, such as allergies and asthma

If you think you have a health problem caused by mold in your home, call the occupational health clinic at your local Naval Hospital, Branch Clinic or your personal physician for an appointment. If your doctor diagnoses a specific problem associated with mold, he may ask a Naval Hospital industrial hygienist to evaluate your home environment.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MOLD IN MY HOUSE?

Some routine measures will help prevent mold growth in your home. The most effective step is to eliminate the source of water because mold must have water to grow. Mold growth is almost always associated with moisture, water leaks, or elevated humidity levels. Here are some things you can do to keep mold from growing:

1. Report any water problems or leaks to the Housing Manager. These should be repaired as soon as possible.
2. Keep indoor humidity levels low (30-60% is ideal) by venting bathrooms, dryers, and other moisture-generating sources to the outside; using air conditioners and dehumidifiers; increasing seasonal cross-flow ventilation by opening windows and doors periodically; and using exhaust fans when cooking and dishwashing.
3. Don't install carpeting in areas that are likely to be damp (bathrooms, garages or foyers).
4. Dry out wet areas as soon as possible, but at least within 48 hours, to prevent significant mold growth.
5. Clean small amounts of mold on hard surfaces (less than 10 square feet) using soap and water. Wear

rubber gloves and scrub the affected area with the soapy water until clean. Rinse with clean water. Let the treated area dry naturally overnight.

- Do not use ammonia cleaners.
- Do not clean up mold if you have been diagnosed with mold allergies or sensitivities.
- Do not clean large areas of mold.

If the mold comes back in a week or two, either the area is still getting wet or all of the mold wasn't cleaned off. Check again for a leak or other water source and repair as needed. Repeat the cleaning procedure twice: scrub, rinse, scrub, rinse and dry completely.

HOW DO I TELL IF I HAVE A MOLD PROBLEM IN MY HOUSE?

Look around! 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 suspicious odors. Mold often appears as discoloration, staining, or fuzzy growth on the surface of building materials or furnishings. If you see what you think is mold (appears cottony, velvety, granular, or leathery; has varied colors of white, gray, brown, black, yellow, green) or if there is an earthy or musty smell, you should assume a mold problem exists.

SAMPLING OR TESTING FOR MOLD

Is sampling for mold needed?

In most cases, if visible mold growth is present, sampling is unnecessary. Since no EPA or other federal limits have been set for mold or mold spores, sampling cannot be used to check a building's compliance with federal mold standards.