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### Mold in the Home

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Whether it's in the bathroom, basement or yes, even in the fridge, mold needs to be removed and disposed of. Your most important job, however is to eliminate the causes of mold in the home. Lowe's is happy to provide this information as a service to you.

#### Mold Facts

Mold can be expected in even the cleanest home. Mold is a fungus whose spores are always present in the air — millions of them. When conditions are right, these spores attach to an accommodating surface and form a "colony." These colonies are commonly known as mold or mildew — terms we tend to use interchangeably.

Mold takes on many colors. Shades of blue, green, black, brown, white, red or orange are normal. A musty smell in the house is also a signal that mold may be present.

Mold and mildew can be found (in, on or under) walls, floors, ductwork, attics, crawlspaces, gutters, ceiling tiles, houseplants, window frames and many other spots. Leaky roofing or roofs where ice dams have intruded can harbor mold colonies.

Today's energy-efficient homes are pretty air-tight. When housing spaces are not ventilated properly, moisture and stale air (two of mold spore's primary environmental triggers) can be trapped. But don't blame your home for the majority of mold cases. Mold can occur where three environmental triggers combine. When the correct temperature, food and moisture meet the right species of mold, it won't be long before a colony appears.

*The environmental conditions present after natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes are notorious grounds for mold and mildew.*

The optimum temperature for mold to form depends on the fungus itself. Mold can be equally at home in a refrigerator or an attic, but warmer temperatures primarily trigger mold growth.

Mold feeds on organic matter such as can be found in drywall, insulation, fabric, leather, carpet and paint. Dirt and dust also provide nutrition for a mold colony. These food supplies can even rest on unsealed concrete block, shower curtains and glass.

Moisture can take the form of liquid (rain or flood water) or vapor (a room's relative humidity). Moisture can also result from the capillary action of water being absorbed by porous materials like wood, drywall, carpet and brick. Air can contain a lot of moisture and warmer air holds more moisture.

#### Cleaning Mold

When you see a spot of mold, clean it. Acting within the first 24-48 hours of identification is important to prevent the colony from spreading. But first, determine if you're faced with an infestation or merely a simple cleanup. The US EPA recommends that if the affected area is larger than 3' x 3', you should find a professional mold remediation contractor. Always make sure you choose contractors carefully. Hard surfaces such as tile can be easily cleaned. Absorbent surfaces such as drywall will need to be replaced.

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#### Mold and Allergies

Mold can also be a serious health concern for those with respiratory problems. It is important to note that mold is capable of causing allergic distress whether it is alive or dead. Mold spores can prompt allergic reactions ranging from mild to severe in some individuals. Asthma attacks can also result from exposure to mold. Anyone with respiratory problems should use extra caution when dealing with mold. The US EPA has more information on mold and asthma.

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### Fixing the Problem

To prevent future mold episodes, make reducing moisture in the home your number one priority.

- Bathrooms and basements (especially basements that have converted to living space) are prime locations for mold colonies.
- Relative humidity should be in the 30-60% range. A home dehumidifier is one way to regulate humidity indoors.
- Ventilation is critical to maintaining a mold-free home.
  - Range hoods and bathroom fans must vent to the exterior of the house (such as through the roof soffit), Venting directly into the attic merely moves moisture, rather than eliminating it.
  - An attic ridge vent or roof turbine lowers humidity.
  - Ceiling fans or portable fans can increase air circulation.
- Install and maintain vapor barriers where needed.
- Seal masonry foundations and flash chimneys to prevent leaks into the house.
- Add insulation to reduce condensation.
- Pay close attention to your plumbing system. Small leaks can be easily repaired and can prevent major repairs in the future.
  - Repair leaks and replace any faulty fixtures.
  - Maintain caulking and flashing around windows, doors, bathtubs, windows, chimneys, vent pipes and roofing.
- Clean and maintain air conditioning units and air handlers.
- Regularly empty and clean the water reservoirs of humidifiers and dehumidifiers.
- Keep the area around washers (including water hoses), dishwashers and refrigerators clean and dry. Vent clothes dryers outside of the house
- Keep gutters and downspouts leaf-free and clear of debris.
- Keep up with general housekeeping chores:
  - Avoid accumulating wet or damp laundry.
  - Clean shower curtains.
  - Open the closet door to allow air circulation.
  - Clean mats at entryways to reduce tracked-in mold spores.

**Cleaning solutions.** *A simple formula of one gallon water to one cup of chlorine bleach is adequate (make sure you protect plants below from runoff) for cleaning many molds. Using non-chlorine bleach, detergents and commercially prepared cleaning solutions are options.*

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#### Black Mold

Several molds may be categorized as hazardous. *Stachybotris*, more commonly known as black mold is a black/green-colored mold that occurs mainly on items containing cellulose. These items include paper, fiberboard and wallboard. In order for black mold to form, excessive moisture needs to be present. The catalyst therefore can be high humidity, leaks or other water damage. The space between walls and floors are ideal environments for mold to grow unnoticed. The problem may remain hidden from view for some time, creating a significant problem.



*Not all black/green mold is *Stachybotris*.*

*Mold test kits are available in some Lowe's stores. If you have any doubts about the presence of black mold, the US EPA Web site provides additional information on identifying and dealing with *stachybotris*. Also available is a (pdf) guide to mold, moisture and your home.*

*If you have medical concerns about molds, always consult with a physician.*