

Fact Sheet

Mold in Rental Housing

WHAT IS MOLD AND WHAT CAUSES IT?

Mold is a type of fungus that is present in our natural environment. Mold spores, which are tiny microscopic 'seeds', can be found virtually everywhere, including in homes, and are a part of the general dust found in homes. These spores can grow on building materials and furnishings if conditions are correct. Excess moisture is the critical factor in any indoor mold problem. Mold growth should not be tolerated in our homes. Eventually, the moisture and mold will damage what it is growing on, which may include both the building and the renter's personal belongings. The key to preventing mold growth is to prevent moisture problems.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH CONCERNS?

Health effects from exposure to mold can vary greatly depending on the person, the amount of mold in their home. The type of symptoms that may occur include coughing, wheezing, nasal symptoms and throat symptoms. People with asthma or allergies who are sensitive to mold may notice their asthma or allergy symptoms worsen. Individuals with severely weakened immune system who are exposed to moldy environments are at risk of developing serious fungal respiratory infections.

The term "toxic mold" is not accurate. While certain molds are toxigenic, meaning they can produce toxins (specifically mycotoxins), the molds themselves are not toxic, or poisonous. Hazards presented by molds that may produce mycotoxins should be considered the same as other common molds which can grow in your house. There is always a little mold everywhere - in the air and on many surfaces. There are very few reports that toxigenic molds found inside homes can cause unique or rare health conditions such as pulmonary hemorrhage or memory loss. These case reports are rare, and a causal link between the presence of the toxigenic mold and these conditions has not been proven.

A common-sense approach should be used for any mold contamination existing inside buildings and homes. The common health concerns from molds include hay fever-like allergic symptoms. Certain individuals with chronic respiratory disease (chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, asthma) may experience difficulty breathing. Individuals with immune suppression may be at increased risk for infection from molds. If you or your family members have these conditions, a qualified medical clinician should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment. For the most part, one should take routine measures to prevent mold growth in the home.

WHAT CAN I DO AS A TENANT?

Generally, the landlord is responsible for repairing moisture problems and cleaning up mold, unless it is a minor issue related to the tenant's behavior.

Tenants should look at their own behaviors to determine whether they may contribute to the moisture problem that is causing mold. Here are some tips:

1. Always use bathroom fans during and after bathing/showering.
2. Avoid spilling liquids on carpet. If this occurs, quickly dry carpets (if carpets stay wet, notify the landlord).
3. Use the kitchen fans when cooking.
4. Avoid using humidifiers unless there is a medical reason to use one.
5. Ensure good air movement in your home to prevent condensation on cold surfaces
 - a. open windows when possible,
 - b. don't block supply and return registers with furniture
 - c. keep a few inches of space between furniture and walls
 - d. Watch what you put down drains to avoid clogging and over-flows

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT INDOOR MOLD?

Tenants and landlords should try to work cooperatively to investigate and correct moisture problems and remove mold growth. If mold can be seen, if a musty odor is present, or if there is good reason to believe health problems are being caused by mold, a careful inspection of the home should be conducted. Attention should be paid to hidden areas, such as plumbing access areas, crawl spaces, behind mirrors, attics, behind furnishings, closets and cupboards.

Correcting a mold problem properly requires fixing the moisture problem, removing the mold, and keeping the home dry in the future. Mold growth should be cleaned from (non-porous) surfaces such as concrete, metal, glass, tile, and solid wood. Mold growth is difficult to clean on absorbent (porous) surfaces such as dry wall, carpet, fleecy furnishing, and insulation. These moldy materials should be discarded. Personal belongings can be kept if there is no mold growth in them. They may need a deep cleaning to remove mold particles that have settled in the fabric. Merely applying a chemical, like bleach without removing the mold growth is not an effective solution; neither is simply painting over the problem.

If you have questions about building mold, contact the Saranac Lake Code Enforcement Officer at (518) 891-4150 or ceo@saranaclakeny.gov

If you have questions about health issues related to mold exposure, contact your personal physician or the Saranac Lake health Officer at (518) 891-4150 or pho@saranaclakeny.gov