



# Disaster News

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## **MOLD IS A GROWING PROBLEM IN FLOOD-DAMAGED WISCONSIN HOMES**

### *Mold can cause adverse health effects*

**LA CROSSE, Wis.** — If your home was affected in the recent flooding it could be harboring mold.

"Mold can be a significant problem after flooding and proper cleanup is critical to ensure that it does not affect you or your family's health," Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services Secretary Kevin R. Hayden said.

Care must be taken to clean and completely dry any areas of the home that have gotten wet from floodwaters to prevent structural damage and adverse health effects from mold.

"People are anxious to get on with their lives after a flood, but if you had flood waters in your home take the time to clean thoroughly so problems don't arise later that affect your home or your health," Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Coordinating Officer Mike Bolch said.

### **Mold and Health Concerns**

Mold growth is a common occurrence in flood-damaged homes and damp environments. Mold could become a problem in your home if there is enough moisture available to allow mold to thrive and multiply. Dampness in basements, walls, carpets, and wood provides an environment for mold to flourish.

Mold is made up of simple microscopic organisms that are found virtually everywhere. It can often be seen in the form of discoloration, ranging from white to orange and from green to brown and black, and gives off a musty or earthy smell.

Exposure to mold can cause health problems. Infants, children, immune-compromised patients, pregnant women, individuals with existing respiratory conditions, (allergies, multiple chemical sensitivity, and asthma) and the elderly appear to be at higher risks for adverse health effects from mold.

Health symptoms known to be associated with exposure to mold include nose and throat irritation, wheeze, cough, asthma attacks in individuals who have asthma, and lower respiratory tract infections (in children). People with pre-existing respiratory conditions may also be susceptible to more serious lung infections.

## **Mold Prevention Tips**

There is no practical way for you to eliminate all of the molds and mold spores in the indoor environment. But there are many ways to help control moisture and mold growth in your home. The basic rule is, if you can see or smell mold, take steps to eliminate the excess moisture, and to cleanup and remove the mold. It is important to quickly identify and correct any moisture sources before health problems develop.

### **Stop the Water**

- Fix leaks in pipes, and any damp area around tubs and sinks, so mold spores don't have a growing environment
- Rebuild, or retrofit, with water-resistant building materials such as tile, stone, deep-sealed concrete, galvanized or stainless steel hardware, indoor/outdoor carpeting, waterproof wallboard, water-resistant glues and so on
- Prevent seepage of water from outdoors into your house. It's important to have rainwater from gutters or the roof drain away from the house. Ground around the house needs to slope away to keep basement and crawl space dry
- Cover dirt in crawl spaces with plastic to prevent moisture from coming from the ground. Ventilate the area as much as possible

### **Keep It Clean**

- Clean fabrics, such as curtains and upholstery, often and keep them dry, because soil promotes mold growth
- Store clean fabric items in well-ventilated areas
- Consider having air ducts cleaned professionally if you suspect mold exists on the inside surface of the duct or if duct insulation has been wet

### **Keep It Dry**

- Reduce the moisture in the air with dehumidifiers, fans and open windows or air conditioners, especially in hot weather. Do NOT use fans if mold may already exist; a fan will spread the mold spores
- Try to keep the humidity in your home below 40%
- In moisture-prone areas, choose carpets of man-made fibers
- Reduce potential for condensation on cold surfaces by insulating

### **Disinfect It**

- Routinely check potential problem spots like the basement, bathroom and laundry for moldy odors
- Disinfect often with a 10% solution of bleach – about 1-1/4 cup of bleach to a gallon of water

### **Additional information on mold and mold cleanup can be found on these Web sites:**

- The Wisconsin Department of Health and Human Services provides a comprehensive description of how to clean and disinfect a mold-damaged home on its environmental health web page. For more information, connect to <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/eh/mold/index.htm> and <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/InjuryPrevention/DisasterHealthSafety/flooding.htm>
- For a printable brochure on mold prevention and cleanup, visit FEMA's recovery web pages at [http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/recover/fema\\_mold\\_brochure\\_english.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/recover/fema_mold_brochure_english.pdf).

FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.

For more information about Wisconsin recovery, please visit [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov), [www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov), [www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance](http://www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance), and <http://emergencymanagement.wi.gov>.