

How to tell if there is mould in your house

Mould likes to grow in damp places. The best places to look for mould are the basement, under or behind items, under kitchen or bathroom sinks, on the walls or floor next to the bathtub or, around the edges of windows and in closets.

Mould can be black, white or almost any colour. It often looks like a stain or smudge. It also usually has a musty odour.

To find out if a stain or smudge is mould, carefully dab the mark with a drop of household bleach. If the colour of the stain changes, or disappears, it is probably a mould.



Cleaning up small areas of mould

Mould areas less than the size of a standard garbage bag folded in half are considered small (1 square meter). You can clean small areas of mould yourself with precautions. For larger areas, you may need to consult your housing department or hire a professional.

When cleaning mould, ensure you wear rubber gloves, safety glasses, a dust mask and a shirt with long sleeves.

Washable surfaces:

Scrub with a detergent solution, then sponge with a clean wet rag and dry quickly.

Drywall:

Clean the surface with a damp rag using baking soda and a small amount of detergent. Do not allow the drywall to get too wet.



Mould must be cleaned up but cleaning alone does NOT stop the mould growth! The source of moisture/ dampness must be addressed to prevent mould from re-growing after cleaning.

Health effects of mould

People can respond to mould in different ways. Mould may not affect some people, but cause irritation in others. This may depend on amount of exposure and individual health.

Some common effects may include:

- eye, nose and throat irritation
- coughing, wheezing and phlegm build-up
- wheezing and shortness of breath
- increase of asthma symptoms
- allergic reactions

Air testing for mould is typically not recommended. Regardless of the type of mould present, the mould should be cleaned and sources of moisture should be addressed. An air test offers little in terms of prediction of health effects and cause.

If you suspect there is mould in your house, first begin with a visual inspection and remove sources of excess moisture. If the issues persists, contact your housing department for next steps in investigating.

Resources:

Adopted from *"First Nations Occupants Guide to Mold"* pamphlet, prepared by Assembly of First Nations, CMHC, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Mould in Housing, Information for First Nations Occupants, CMHC, 2017.

More information available at

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1582657493726/1582657520276>

MOULD in Housing



Information for First Nation Occupants

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This pamphlet will tell you:

- How to prevent mould from growing
- How to find out if mould is growing in your house
- How to clean up small amounts of mould

How to prevent mould from growing

Mould needs moisture to grow. *Controlling moisture and keeping the house dry* is the key to preventing the growth of mould.

Check your house for signs of moisture or mould. Look for water coming in from outside, plumbing leaks or excessive moisture produced in the house. Check your house foundation, walls and roof for leaks. Also check for plumbing leaks. If any leaks are found, they need to be fixed as quickly as possible. Think of the different ways moisture is produced inside the house, for example, activities such as cooking and bathing. Remove the moisture as it is produced by opening a window or using well working exhaust fans.

Reduce the amount of stored materials, especially items that are no longer used including fabrics, paper, wood and other materials that collect dust and hold moisture.

Mould proofing your house

Basement or crawlspace

Get rid of clothes, paper and furniture stored in the basement. Keep only items you can wash. Throw out any wet and damaged or musty smelling materials. Keep the basement tidy so air can move around more easily. Store firewood outside the house, in a shed or garage. Avoid having carpets on the basement floor. Periodically clean the drain in your basement floor- Use half a cup of bleach, let stand for several minutes, then flush with plenty of water.

A dehumidifier helps to reduce moisture in the basement during warmer months. Close basement windows when the dehumidifier is running. Avoid standing water. Keep the sump pit covered- use a piece of metal or wood wrapped in plastic. Quickly clean and dry out any leaks in crawlspaces.

Furnace

Regularly clean and replace the furnace filters. Use a pleated, one-inch filter. If you have a heat recovery ventilator (HRV), clean the filter inside the HRV often. If you notice mould or signs of dampness, such as water on your windows or wet spots elsewhere, do not humidify. Disconnect furnace humidifiers that are no longer used.

Laundry

Ensure your clothes dryer is connected to an exhaust ducted to the outside. Remove lint every time you use the dryer. Avoid hanging laundry indoors to dry. Dry your laundry tub and washing machine each after use.

Bathroom

Check the bathroom fan to make sure it exhausts to the outside, not your attic. Turn the bathroom fan on when showering. Keep it running for a few minutes after you finish showering. Take shorter showers, if possible. Keep surfaces that get wet, such as the walls and floor around the bath tub and shower, clean and dry.

Keep drains in good shape by removing debris. To do this:

- Pour a handful of baking soda into drain
- Add a cup of vinegar
- Put the plug in or close the drain
- Let the mixture sit for approximately 20 mins
- Run fresh water down the drain
- If the drain is still plugged, use a small plumbing snake to unplug it.

Kitchen

If the fan over your stove exhausts outside, use it when you cook and try to minimize prolonged boiling. Keep sink drains clear and in good shape. Periodically clean the refrigerator drip pan, located at the back of the fridge. Vacuum dust from the coils at the back of the fridge. Check under the kitchen sink to ensure there are no leaks. Take out garbage daily to prevent odours and spoiling.

Closet & bedroom

Get rid of clothes and other unused stored items. Keeping these areas clean and tidy makes it easier for air to circulate and harder for mould to grow.

Other parts of the house

Have guests remove footwear in the house. Vacuum often with a HEPA filter, if possible, which is more efficient in removing small particles of dust and mould. Clean hard floors with a damp mop. Do not bring furniture that has been stored outside into the house. Reduce the number of potted plants in the house- soil is a good place for mould to grow.

Outside the house

Install downspout extensions so rainwater and melted snow is diverted away from the house. Ensure eavestrough, downspouts and extensions are connected and working. Grade the soil so the ground slopes away from the house. Fix any problems as quickly as possible.

