

Flood Response Guidance

from Public Health Madison and Dane County

Mold can be a problem under normal conditions but is a greater concern when homes and other buildings are flooded by natural events such as heavy rains and storms or building problems such as a backed up sanitary sewer.

Mold is a natural part of our outdoor environment. However, when allowed to grow inside, mold may cause significant health problems for building inhabitants. Although not everyone becomes sick when mold is present, some typical responses to mold are headache, breathing difficulties, skin irritation, allergic reactions, and aggravation of asthma. Sometimes, these effects can be severe.

To avoid health problems, it is important to make timely efforts to repair water damage and eliminate mold problems. Drying a room or building within 48-hours greatly improves your chances of avoiding a mold problem in the future. To avoid mold and other indoor air quality problems after flooding, consider taking the following actions:

- Remove water as quickly as possible from flooded spaces.
 - ~ Turn off electricity before entering a flooded basement.
 - ~ If you smell natural gas, leave immediately and call your utility company.
 - ~ Don't use gasoline-powered pumps indoors because they produce toxic carbon monoxide.
 - ~ If there are more than a few feet of water in your basement, you may need to wait for the level of ground water to drop before pumping water out of your basement.
 - ~ Fans and dehumidifiers will likely be necessary to finish drying out the basement.
- Remove and throw out porous materials that have been soaked by floodwaters, such as carpets, drywall, insulation, and manufactured wood products.
- If drywall has been damaged, cut and remove the drywall up to at least one foot above the water line to ensure all wet drywall is removed.
- Hard surfaced materials (metal, solid wood, plastic, or glass) may be salvageable if cleaned and dried thoroughly.
- Allow flooded spaces to dry thoroughly before rebuilding the walls or laying new carpet. It may be necessary to use large fans and dehumidifiers to dry the space completely.
- After cleaning with soap and water, disinfection with a dilute bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) can be used to control mold and bacteria.
 - ~ Do not use full strength bleach. This increases the chance of breathing problems and does not increase disinfection.
 - ~ Do not combine bleach and ammonia cleaning products.
 - ~ Ensure that the space being cleaned is ventilated to reduce exposure to cleaning or disinfection products.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after clean up. If handling sewage-contaminated waters, wear waterproof gloves and boots.
- Prevent children from playing in floodwaters and wash their hands frequently.
- When cleaning moldy surfaces, wear waterproof gloves, particle mask, and safety glasses to decrease exposure. When mold has become established in areas greater than 10 square feet, you may wish to hire a professional.
- If your private well has been flooded, you should obtain water from a known safe source for drinking, cooking, and food preparation.

- ~ If no other safe source of water is available, boil water for at least five minutes before drinking, cooking, or food preparation.
- ~ Disinfect your well and plumbing system before drawing water from the well.
- ~ Water testing is available from Public Health by contacting the Department at 243-0356
- Throw out any food that comes in contact with floodwater.

For further information including detailed instructions for eliminating and preventing mold call the Department of Public Health for Madison and Dane County at (608) 243-0330. For a copy of the Department's informational brochure, go to:

<http://www.publichealthmdc.com/environmental/air/problems.cfm#mold>

Additional information is available at the following agencies:

WI Department of Health and Family Services

<http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/eh/HlthHaz/fs/moldindx.htm>

WI Department of Natural Resources

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/dwg/flood.htm>

US Environmental Protection Agency:

<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds>

Federal Emergency Management Agency:

<http://www.fema.gov/hazard/midwestfloods.shtm>