

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

FLOOD INFORMATION SHEET

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: INDOOR MOLD

The Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County (DOH-St. Lucie) has a list of Frequently Asked Questions to address some of the most common questions and concerns about indoor mold.

How can I tell if there is mold in my home?

Indoor mold growth can usually be seen or smelled. Look for visible mold growth as it may look cottony, velvety, rough, or leathery and have different colors like white, gray, brown, black, yellow, or green. Mold often appears as a staining or fuzzy growth on furniture or building materials, such as walls, ceilings, or anything made of wood or paper. Look for signs of moisture or water damage, such as water leaks, standing water, water stains, and condensation. Check around air handling units, such as air conditioners and furnaces, for standing water. Routinely inspect the evaporator coils, liner surfaces, drain pans, and drain lines. Search areas where you notice mold odors. If you can smell an earthy or musty odor, you may have a mold problem.

Who is most affected by mold?

Infants, children, elderly, individuals with chronic respiratory conditions, and persons with weakened immune systems may be affected sooner and more severely than others. Those with concerns should consult a medical doctor if they feel their health is affected by indoor mold.

What health problems can be caused by mold?

There are four kinds of health problems that come from exposure to mold: allergic illness, irritant effects, infection, and toxic effects. For people that are sensitive to molds, symptoms may occur such as nasal and sinus irritation or congestion, dry hacking cough, wheezing, skin rashes or burning, or watery or reddened eyes. People with severe allergies to molds may have more serious reactions, such as hay fever-like symptoms or shortness of breath. People with chronic illnesses or people with immune system problems may be more likely to get infections from certain molds, viruses, and bacteria. Molds can also trigger asthma attacks in persons with asthma. Headaches, memory problems, mood swings, nosebleeds, and body aches and pains are sometimes reported in mold complaints. The long-term presence of indoor mold may eventually become a problem.

How should mold be cleaned?

Mold should be cleaned as soon as it appears. Persons who clean the mold should be free

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of symptoms and allergies. Small areas of mold should be cleaned using detergent/soapy water or a commercial mildew or mold cleaner. Ozone generators do not need be used. Gloves and safety goggles should be worn during cleaning. The cleaned area should then be thoroughly dried. Throw away any sponges or rags used to clean mold. If the mold returns quickly or spreads, it may mean you have an underlying problem, such as a water leak. Any water leaks must first be fixed when solving mold problems. If there is a lot of mold growth, consult the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) booklet, "Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings," at <http://www.epa.gov/mold/>. If the moldy material is not easily cleanable; such as drywall, carpet padding, and insulation; then removal and replacement may be necessary.

Who should do the cleanup?

One consideration is the size of the mold problem. If the moldy area is less than about 10 square feet, which is less than about a 3-foot by 3-foot patch, in most cases can handled yourself. However, if there has been a lot of water damage, and/or mold growth covers more than 10 square feet, consult the EPA booklet referenced above. Although written about schools and commercial buildings, this document also helps address mold in other building types. If you have concerns regarding your health before starting the cleanup, consult your doctor.

If you choose to hire a contractor, consider someone licensed by the State of Florida. The mold assessor or mold remediator license can be checked by using the "VERIFY A LICENSE" link at <http://www.myFloridaLicense.com>. Check references and ask the contractor to follow current recommendations by EPA, and the guidelines of the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) or other professional or government organizations.

If you think the heating or air conditioning (HVAC) system has been affected, read the EPA's guide "Should You Have the Air Ducts in Your Home Cleaned?" at <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/should-you-have-air-ducts-your-home-cleaned>. Consult a licensed air-conditioning or mechanical contractor for additional information.

Who can I call if I want more information on mold?

For additional information, call DOH-St. Lucie's Environmental Health Office or the Florida Department of Health's (Department), Radon and Indoor Program. They can provide guidance and advice on prevention, identification of mold problems, investigation techniques, clean-up methods, disaster planning and messaging, health effects including possible hazards of mold exposure, and direct concerned people to appropriate local resources.

Where can I obtain additional information?

More information can be found through U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<http://www.cdc.gov/mold/>), and the University of Central Florida, Florida Solar Energy Center (<http://www.fsec.ucf.edu/en/consumer/buildings/basics/moldgrowth.htm>).

For further information, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/indoorair>, contact DOH-St. Lucie at 772-873-4931, or the Department's Radon and Indoor Program at 850-245-4288 or Toll-free at 1-800-543-8279.