

Asthma and Allergy Triggers



Mold and Moisture

Molds are everywhere and float through the air inside and outside all of the time. When mold spores land where there is moisture and food, they grow.

Molds can cause allergy symptoms and trigger an asthma attack when breathed in.



What Does Mold Need to Grow?

Molds grow easily and need only moisture and a food source to reproduce.

Moisture sources include:

- Leaky pipes
- Leaky roof
- Leaky windows
- Humidity from outside and inside (showers, cooking)
- Spills
- Floods
- Window air-conditioning units

Food sources include:

- Paper products
- Ceiling tiles
- Drywall
- Wall paper
- Insulation
- Carpeting
- Fabric
- Upholstery
- Wood



There is no way to remove all mold spores from your home, but you can control mold growth by keeping your home dry. Monitor humidity with a humidity detector.

Prevent: Keep it Dry Inside

- Prevent mold growth by finding the source of moisture and fixing it. Common places to monitor include around windows, air conditioners, under sinks, and ceiling tiles.
- Keep the humidity of your home between 30-50%. You can purchase a humidity detector to help you monitor, for about \$15 at a hardware store or online to help you monitor.
- In damp places like the kitchen and bathroom, use an exhaust fan or open a window to control moisture.
- Wipe down damp surfaces after cooking, washing dishes and bathing. Using your air conditioning also helps to keep your home dry.
- Dry water damaged areas and items within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth. A dehumidifier can help remove moisture from the air.
- Clothes dryers should be vented to the outside, not into the attic or crawl space.

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Get Rid of Mold Safely

- If you can see mold or smell a musty odor, you have a mold problem. There is usually no need to test for mold.
 1. Get rid of the moisture (fix the leak, reduce dampness, dry out from a flood), or the mold will keep coming back.
 2. Clean up small areas of mold, like in the shower, with detergent and water. Bleach is not required and should only be used after soap/water (being careful when used around asthmatics). Dry completely.
 3. Large areas of mold (bigger than an oven door) should be assessed and addressed by a professional. Mold can grow in crawlspaces and HVAC systems which should be carefully inspected. Tips on hiring a professional can be found at: <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oii/mold/consultant.html>
- Carpets that cannot be dried in 48 hours or are contaminated with flood or sewer water should be removed.



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Avoid Outdoor Molds

- Molds can be found almost anywhere outside, including soil, plants and rotting wood.
- Outdoor mold spores begin to increase as temperatures rise in the spring and reach their peak in July in warmer states.
- In peak months, stay indoors, preferably in an air conditioned building.
- Don't mow lawns or rake leaves if you are sensitive to molds. Also avoid hanging sheets or clothes outside to dry.
- When traveling by car, keep your windows closed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

UNC Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility: www.sph.unc.edu/cehs

**NC Division of Public Health
Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch**
(919) 733-3421;
<http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oii/mold/>

NC Asthma Program:
(919) 707-5213; www.asthma.ncdhhs.gov

US Environmental Protection Agency:
www.epa.gov

NC Healthy Homes Initiative:
<http://www.nchealthyhomes.com>