Mold 101

Rochester Healthy Home Partnership

Thanks to: Healthy Environments for Children Initiative Department of Extension, University of Connecticut
What features make a home healthy?

- Safe?
- Dry?
- No pests?
- Fresh air?
- In good repair?
- Clean?
- No dangerous chemicals?
Keep it dry

Reduce pests and mold
• A home with too much moisture encourages mold and pests to live and grow

Main idea
• Both mold and pests can
  – Damage belongings
  – Cause various health problems
Keep it dry

Health effects

Mold
- May make breathing problems worse, especially for people with
  - Asthma
  - Allergies to mold
  - Respiratory illnesses (such as lung infections)

Pests
- May trigger asthma attacks
- May carry diseases
Keep it dry

Signs of problem

• Leaking or dripping pipes
• Water droplets on cold windows
• Water stains or damage
• Warping or rotting wood
• Peeling, blistering, or cracking paint
• Clogged gutters or plugged downspouts
• Cracks in foundation

• Mold that you see (often as speckled patches, in any color) or smell (musty or earthy), especially in
  – Bathrooms and kitchens
  – Damp basements, closets, and laundry areas
  – Areas where there have been leaks or water damage
Keep it dry

Fix the problem

Reduce moisture

• Find sources of moisture—such as leaks inside and outside home—and repair them
• Clean up water and other spills right away
• Use exhaust fans or open windows
  – In bathroom after showering or bathing
  – In kitchen when cooking and washing dishes
• Clean downspouts and gutters
• Make sure that water drains away from home
• Use dehumidifiers and air-conditioners if available
Mold

If you see or smell it, it should be cleaned up promptly

• Usually **not** necessary to test to learn
  – Whether you have mold
  – Type of mold
• Consider hiring trained professional if
  – Moldy area is large
  – Damage was caused by contaminated water (like sewage)
  – Mold is hidden in walls or ceilings
  – You have asthma, severe allergies to mold, or a weak immune system
Mold
To safely clean hard surfaces (like tile or fiberglass)
• Keep other people away from area where you’ll be working
• Close off area: shut door, or put up plastic sheet
• Bring in fresh air (open windows, or blow air from inside to outside with exhaust fan)
• Protect yourself
  – Wear long rubber gloves
  – Consider goggles and a face mask
• Scrub well with detergent and water
• Rinse with clean rag or sponge and clean water
• Dry thoroughly with clean rags or paper towels
Keep it dry

Fix the problem

Mold

• If item—like carpet or upholstered furniture—absorbs water, you may be able to save it if
  – You can dry it completely within 24 hours (warm weather) to 48 hours (cold weather) and
  – You don’t see or smell any mold
• If item has been wet for more than 24-48 hours
  – Throw it out

When in doubt, throw it out
Keep the air fresh

Main idea

Make breathing easier

• Most people spend most of their time indoors

• Indoor air often contains unhealthy chemicals from
  – Household products (such as cleaning supplies)
  – Furnaces
  – Other devices

• Bringing fresh air into home
  – Helps to remove or dilute these chemicals
  – Makes breathing healthier
Keep the air fresh

Health effects

- Chemicals from household products may have various health effects
- In home that is poorly ventilated, poor air quality may

- Make allergy or asthma symptoms worse
- Make your eyes red
- Make your nose and throat burn
- Make you feel tired
- Give you headaches often
- Allow mold to grow
Keep the air fresh

Signs of problem

- You see or smell mold, fumes, smoke, or strong or unpleasant smells
- Surfaces are very dusty
- Heating and air conditioner filters and vents are dirty or clogged with dust
- Clothes dryer is not vented to outside
- Exhaust fans in bathrooms or kitchen are
  - Missing
  - Not working
  - Not vented to outside
Keep the air fresh

Fix the problem

• Bring in fresh air
  – Open windows whenever possible
• Vent air that’s not fresh to the outside
  – Use exhaust fans vented to the outside in bathrooms and kitchens
  – Vent all appliances that burn fuel to the outside
Mold messages

• Don’t panic!
• Mold affects different people differently
• Cleanup with:
  – Water and detergent, not bleach
  – Dry thoroughly
  – Dispose of materials that can’t be cleaned
• Mold means moisture: address the cause
• Monitor moisture (30-50% RH)
• Get help for bigger problems
Local mold resources

- City of Rochester
- Monroe County Department of Public Health
- Housing professionals
- Mold specialists (environmental firms)
Mold resources (internet)

- https://www.epa.gov/mold
- https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/air_quality/