

Addressing Mold in Homes

The following are the four steps for addressing mold in homes.

Step 1. Determine If there is a mold problem.

If you can see or smell mold in your home, there is a mold problem and you do not need any testing at this point and should proceed to Steps 2, 3, and 4.

For most home mold problems, there is no need to test the mold to determine if it is “toxic” mold. In typical residential settings, while having the potential to cause allergy and respiratory issues (e.g. asthma), molds do not cause toxic health effects. Thus, knowing the type of the mold is of little value, as it does not change the approach to fixing the mold problem (e.g. fixing the underlying moisture problem and removing the mold).

If there is a dispute as to whether there is actually mold in the home (e.g. a dispute between a tenant and owner), then testing can be conducted to confirm mold growth.

Step 2. Fix the moisture problem.

All mold growth in homes is a direct result of elevated moisture levels in the materials that the mold is growing on. This elevated moisture may be the result of liquid water entering the home through roof, wall, or window leaks, and/or condensation of water vapor from humid air onto cold surfaces. Failure to fix the underlying moisture problem(s) will result in mold growth to recur.

Step 3. Remove the mold.

The materials with mold growth need to be identified and mitigated. These include the areas with visible mold growth as well as those areas with concealed mold growth (e.g. in wall or ceiling cavities).

Typically this means removal and disposal of materials like moldy gypsum wallboard (i.e. dry wall, sheetrock). For mold growth on structural wood materials, the mold can often be removed by sanding and cleaning. Appropriate measures to protect the workers and prevent mold spores from spreading through the home should be adopted based upon the size of the area to be mitigated (e.g. isolation

barriers, negative pressure containments, HEPA filtered vacuums, respiratory protection).

In addition to removing the mold contaminated materials, the indoor spaces typically need to be cleaned of all visible dusts so that mold spores that have accumulated in the dust can be removed. Failure to do this surface cleaning risks continued exposure to elevated indoor concentrations of mold spores and failure of a post-mitigation air testing.

Step 4. Conduct post-mitigation/cleaning inspection and air testing.

Having the space inspected and air tested following the mold mitigation/cleaning is not a legal requirement. The inspection and air testing does however provide documentation that the mold contamination has been successfully mitigated and thus is valuable should the building be ever sold, since mold problems are legally required to be disclosed. This testing needs to be conducted with all windows closed and all air cleaning devices off for 12 hours prior to the testing. A minimum of two air samples at each indoor location and an outdoor location should be collected and analyzed by a laboratory that is AIHA EMLAP accredited.