



Photo provided by Sanit-Air in Troy  
 Wearing protective clothing and a respirator, inspector Connie Morbach of Sanit-Air in Troy finds mold behind tiles in a bathroom.

## Out with the mold, in with the new

### Experts offer advice on mold prevention and remediation

By Mary Beth Almond  
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Even though you might not be able to see or smell it at first, mold floats through the air in the interior of all homes.

But mold, a type of fungus that grows on plants and fibers, and travels through the air as tiny spores, doesn't become a huge problem for homeowners — for the most part — until it lands on a wet or damp spot, breeds and grows.

Besides its unsightly appearance in bathrooms, kitchens and basements, mold gradually destroys whatever it grows on, and can even be hazardous to one's health.

Doctor Michael Harbut, M.D., who works at Providence Hospital in Southfield, says everyone reacts differently to mold, and their reactions depend upon the types and quantities of mold present. Most medical professionals agree that molds can cause significant allergic reactions, including itchy and teary eyes, a runny nose, coughing and rashes. Harbut said additional research is currently being conducted to see what other health problems mold causes.

He said molds can also cause asthma, and can even make asthma worse.

### The EPA offers these mold prevention and control tips:

- If you notice a water leak or spill in your home, clean it up as soon as possible. Mold will likely not grow if wet or damp materials or areas are dried within 24-48 hours.
- Make sure the ground slopes away from the foundation of a building so that water will not leak into or collect around the foundation.
- Keep indoor humidity low — below 60 percent relative humidity — ideally between 30 and 50 percent.
- Keep an eye out for the collection of condensation or moisture — signs of high humidity — on windows, walls or pipes.
- Open a window or run the bathroom fan when showering.
- Open doors and windows to increase ventilation, when needed.
- Vent appliances like dryers and stoves outside to reduce the collection of water vapor in homes.
- Clean and repair roof gutters regularly.
- Keep air conditioning drip pans clean and drain lines unobstructed and flowing properly.
- Cover cold surfaces, such as pipes, with insulation.

Source: *Environmental Protection Agency*

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“If you inhale certain kinds of molds, they can go deep into the lungs and cause what’s called a hypersensitivity response. Some molds, at high enough levels where you actually inhale the mold, can cause a fungus ball to grow in your lungs. It’s uncommon, but it does happen,” he said.

The best way to treat allergic reactions to molds, according to Harbut, is to remove the person from the exposure until the mold colonies are eliminated from the house.

“If people stay in a moldy environment where they are developing these hypersensitivity responses, they can require hospitalization. I’ve actually taken care of patients who’ve died because they didn’t want to leave the environment,” he said.

To avoid the negative results associated with mold, a homeowner needs to control the moisture in his or her home.

According to Chris Cote of Air Analysis — an indoor environmental inspection company in Roseville — if you’ve ever had water damage or water intrusion of any kind, mold could be present in your house.

“If it’s not visible, you look for water leaks, any kind of water stains, or any wet areas. The next thing would be to smell for an odor. You might not see anything because it might be behind a wall, but you will be able to smell it. Another way to look for mold in a home is if you start reacting with upper respiratory problems — sinus, congestion, heaviness in the chest, eye-watering, itching or rashes,” said Cote.

Connie Morbach of Sanit-Air in Troy — a full service indoor air quality company specializing in commercial and residential air duct cleaning and air testing — agrees that if homeowners can smell mold, they need to start looking for it. She suggests looking in basements for stains on the ceilings, checking the carpet in finished basements for wetness near the foundation walls, and searching around bathtubs and windows.

“People should also look in their attics. I’ve had many people tell me they were up there a year ago and there was no damage, but they recently went up there and found there was mold everywhere,” she said.

Another main source of water damage to basement ceilings and floors is the icemaker line to the kitchen.

“Because it’s not on all of the time, you can get these slow leaks, so check for stains in the ceiling underneath,” said Morbach.

To prevent leaks, Morbach suggests using copper lines — as opposed to plastic valves — on toilets and the icemaker line.

Another place mold frequently grows is on wet, porous building materials — such as drywall — that aren’t dried within 24 hours after a leak or spill.

“Wet drywall is mold candy. That’s one of the reasons it’s such a problem now and it wasn’t as big of an issue maybe 100 years ago. With plaster and wood, if they got wet, they are much more forgiving than drywall is,” said Morbach.

Cote said if there is water intrusion of any kind, the best thing a homeowner can do is clean it up and get it dry as quickly as possible — within 24 hours. The next step is to make sure the leak is fixed.

“Without fixing the leak first, it’s not going to do any good because the mold will come back,” said Cote.

For additional moisture and mold prevention and control tips, call the EPA Indoor Quality Information Clearinghouse at (800) 438-4318 or visit [www.epa.gov/mold](http://www.epa.gov/mold).

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