



**FEMA**

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# News Release

## **MOLD CAN BE A DANGER AFTER FLOODING**

**SOMERSET, N.J.** – Mold can create serious health problems for residents following the severe storms and flooding in March, warn State and Federal Emergency Management (FEMA) officials overseeing the New Jersey recovery effort.

"People are anxious to get on with their lives after a flood," said Federal Coordinating Officer William L. Vogel, FEMA's top official for the disaster recovery, "but if you had flood waters in your home, take the time to clean thoroughly so problems don't arise later that affect your home or your health."

Officials urge residents and owners of flooded property to take action now and not wait until inspectors arrive.

"Local and state health officials have a wealth of information to share on this topic," said State Coordinating Officer Lt. Bill McDonnell of the New Jersey State Emergency Management Office. "We urge the public to take advantage of these resources."

### **Hazards of mold infestation**

Health officials say problems from exposure can follow if mold is disturbed through cleanup procedures. Also, mold is easily transferred from one surface to another. Infants, children, immune-compromised patients, pregnant women, individuals with existing respiratory conditions (allergies, multiple chemical sensitivity, and asthma) and the elderly appear to be at higher risks for adverse health effects from mold.

Symptoms include nose and throat irritation, wheeze, cough, asthma attacks in individuals who have asthma, and lower respiratory tract infections (in children). People with pre-existing respiratory conditions also may be susceptible to more serious lung infections. It is important to identify mold early and take steps to clean it up and prevent more mold activity.

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### **Identifying Mold**

Mold growth is a common occurrence in flood-damaged homes and damp environments. Mold can become a problem in your home if there is enough moisture available to allow mold to thrive and multiply. Dampness in basements, walls, carpets, and wood provides an environment for mold to flourish.

Microscopic organisms are found everywhere and develop easily into mold in the presence of water or dampness. Mold discoloration comes in a variety of colors from white to orange and from green to brown or black. Whatever color, it characteristically gives off a musty or earthy smell.

### **Cleaning Up Mold - How to Get Rid of It**

Some items must be removed; others can be cleaned. Here are some tips:

- Control the moisture problem. The source of the water must be identified and corrected.
- Porous materials with extensive mold growth should be discarded (e.g., drywall, carpeting, paper, and ceiling tiles). For heirloom rugs and hardwood furniture, contact a professional cleaner. Most furniture today is made of composite materials, which must be discarded.
- Water can wick up higher than the visible water line. The best practice is to remove the wall board at least two feet above the water line. Check local building codes for specific guidance.
- Appliances such as refrigerators, freezers, cooking stoves, dishwashers, hot water heaters, washing machines and driers contain insulation, which may harbor mold spores without visible evidence and should be discarded.
- Heating and air conditioning filters need to be changed and the system ductwork should be inspected by a professional. Unless the system is away from the flooded area and hasn't been operated, it may have to be replaced.
- Non-porous surfaces, including glass, ceramic, metal and plastic, may be cleaned. A combination of household bleach (which contains sodium hypochlorite) and soap or detergent may be used to wash down walls, floors and other mold-contaminated areas. Follow directions on containers and take particular note of warnings. Wear rubber gloves, protective clothing and a tight-fitting face mask when working around mold.
- **WARNING! Never mix chlorine liquids (bleach) and ammonia. The fumes are toxic!**

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- Mold growing on hard surfaces (such as wood and concrete) can be cleaned. Small areas can be scrubbed with a cleaning rag wetted with diluted detergent. Rubber gloves and a dust mask are recommended for jobs other than routine cleaning. For a large mold problem, or if you are highly sensitive to mold, an experienced professional should do the work.
- In areas where it is impractical to eliminate the moisture source, a 10 percent bleach solution can be used to keep mold growth under control. In areas that can be kept dry, bleach is not necessary, as mold cannot grow in the absence of moisture. When using bleach, ensure that enough fresh air is available because bleach may cause eye, nose, or throat irritation.
- Continue to monitor the area for new mold growth and signs of moisture. This may indicate the need for further repairs or material removal.

For more information on mold or mold clean-up, visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/mold/cleanup.htm>.

Additional information can be found at the following sites:

Federal Emergency Management Agency  
[www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/mold.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/mold.shtm)

State of New Jersey Department of Health  
[www.state.nj.us/health/iep/mold ta.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/health/iep/mold_ta.shtml)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
<http://www.epa.gov/mold/index.html>

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