

# ***Mold—An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure***

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Mold continues to make headlines across the country. There's no doubt that bad air quality inside buildings leads to unhealthy living conditions. Just how severe is the problem? It's hard to say accurately. But a sentiment stated so clearly in an old adage is very timely: "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Providing that "ounce of prevention" requires an understanding of what mold is and where it thrives. Mold comes in thousands of varieties and exists in every indoor and outdoor environment. It is a natural and necessary part of the ecosystem in which we live. While many types of mold have positive benefits, there are several strains that can lead to health problems if allowed to flourish indoors.

The problem arises when moisture and humidity levels are uncontrolled. Mold typically found in homes is a living organism and requires three favorable conditions in which to grow:

Temperature range: Between 40 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit

Food Source: Organic material (wood, dust, paper, etc.)

Moisture: Water, or water vapor (high humidity, plumbing or roof leaks, etc.)

People need the same conditions to survive. Of the three components required for mold growth, moisture is the only one we can control while maintaining comfortable living conditions.

Most major mold problems are attributed to large quantities of water. Plumbing, roofing and walls can develop leaks. This is often due to deferred maintenance, storm damage or improper material installation. Undetected, a small leak can lead to major problems. Moisture can also accumulate within a home due to cooking, bathing, and physical activity. Condensation from air conditioning units or ductwork as well as air leaks from the exterior of the home can cause elevated moisture left unchecked, this condensation can accumulate and create ideal growing conditions for mold.

Here are some easy steps to prevent elevated moisture in your home.

***Follow your Nose***—Musty odors are a sign of mold growth in a building. Look for visible signs of mold and/or moisture then eliminate the moisture source.

***Humidity Levels***—Current recommendations from the NAHB suggest keeping maximum relative humidity levels below 40% during the heating season (winter) and below 60% during the cooling season (summer).

***Proper Ventilation***—Bathroom fans, kitchen fans and clothes dryers should be vented to the outside of the building envelope (home).

***Proper Housekeeping***—Regular housekeeping and cleaning the ductwork in your air conditioning will eliminate dust, a very important source of food for mold.

***Seal***—Sealing outlets, sill plates, and through-wall penetrations (including doors and windows) can minimize uncontrolled air infiltration. Insulating pipes and ductwork in humid spaces can minimize condensation in these areas. Vinyl wall coverings should not be applied to exterior facing walls or wet areas because moisture can accumulate behind them.

***Inspection and Maintenance***—Regular inspection and cleaning of the condensation drain line on a central air conditioning unit is recommended. Inspect the roof, windows and walls after storms to identify visible water leaks. Regardless of the building system, there is no substitute for good construction practices, regular inspections and preventative maintenance to prevent mold from getting a foothold in your home.

Mold is here to stay but we can do something about it. Homeowners have a responsibility to regularly inspect and maintain the components of their home to ensure that water is not accumulating in the building. Maintain reasonable humidity levels and fresh air exchange rates. Evidence of mold or moisture should be addressed immediately to locate and eliminate the moisture source. Affected materials should be thoroughly dried or removed and replaced.

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