

Mold may be present in flood-damaged homes

Mold can cause health effects

NORTHEAST OHIO - Homes affected in the recent flooding in northeast Ohio could be harboring mold.

"When the water recedes, mold may grow in your home and endanger your health," said Lake County General Health District Environmental Health Director Nancy Niehus. "Proper cleaning and moisture removal will result in a healthier home, especially for those with respiratory illnesses such as asthma."

Care must be taken to clean and completely dry any areas of the home that have gotten wet from floodwaters to prevent structural damage and adverse health effects from mold.

Mold and Health Concerns

Mold growth is a common occurrence in flood-damaged homes and damp environments. Mold could become a problem in a 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.

Mold is made up of simple microscopic organisms that are found virtually everywhere. It often can be seen in the form of discoloration, ranging from white to orange and from green to brown and black, and gives off a musty or earthy smell.

Exposure to mold can cause health problems. 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.

Health symptoms known to be associated with exposure to mold include nose and throat irritation, wheezing, coughing, 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.

Mold Prevention Tips

There is no practical way to eliminate all of the molds and mold spores in the indoor environment, but there are many ways to help control moisture and mold growth in the home. The basic rule is, if residents can see or smell mold, they should take the steps to eliminate excess moisture and to clean up and remove the mold. It is important to quickly identify and correct any moisture sources before health problems develop.

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Stop the Water

- Fix leaks in pipes and clean up any damp area around tubs and sinks, so mold spores don't have a growing environment.

- Rebuild, or retrofit, with water-resistant building materials such as tile, stone, deep-sealed concrete, galvanized or stainless steel hardware, indoor/outdoor carpeting, waterproof wallboard, water-resistant glues, and so on.

- Prevent water seepage from outdoors into the house. It's important to have rainwater from gutters or the roof drain away from the house. Ground around the house needs to slope away to keep basement and crawl space dry.

- Cover dirt in crawl spaces with plastic to prevent moisture from coming from the ground. Ventilate the area as much as possible.

Keep It Clean

- Clean fabrics, such as curtains and upholstery often, and keep them dry, because soil promotes mold growth.

- Store clean fabric items in well-ventilated areas.

- Consider having air ducts cleaned professionally if residents suspect mold exists on the inside surface of the duct or if duct insulation has been wet.

Keep It Dry

- Reduce the moisture in the air by using dehumidifi-

- ers, fans and opening windows or using air conditioners, especially in hot weather. Do NOT use fans if mold already may exist; a fan will spread the mold spores.

- Try to keep the humidity in the home below 40 percent.

- In moisture-prone areas, choose carpets of man-made fibers.

- Reduce potential for condensation on cold surfaces by insulating.

Disinfect It

- Routinely check potential problem spots like the basement, bathroom and laundry for moldy odors.

- Disinfect often with a 10 percent bleach solution

- about 1-1/4 cup of bleach to a gallon of water.

- For more information, please call Lake County General Health District at (440) 350-2543.

- Additional information on mold and mold cleanup can be found on these Web sites:

- The Ohio Department of Health provides a comprehensive description of how to clean and disinfect a mold-damaged home on its environmental health Web page. For more information, connect to <http://www.odh.ohio.gov>.

- For a printable brochure on mold prevention and cleanup, visit FEMA's Web page at http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/recover/fema_mold_brochure_english.pdf.