

How to Clean Up Mold¹

Hyun-Jeong Lee²

Mold Testing: Not Recommended

Many people think the first step to getting rid of the mold in their home is to conduct a test to identify the mold. However, experts do not recommend testing to identify the type of mold because all types can cause problems, regardless of toxicity. Proper tests are expensive and there are no standards for acceptable mold levels. Therefore, experts recommend removing the mold and correcting any moisture problems in the home so that the mold does not return.

Fix the Source of the Problem

If you find or smell any mold in your home, there is a moisture problem, like leaky plumbing or a faulty seal in the home envelope. Whether or not you can see the problem, it is very important to find and fix it before you start the mold removal process, or at least at the same time as water intrusion repairs in cases of severe mold. Otherwise, the mold will appear again very soon. Prompt action is critical. If you do not first fix the moisture problem immediately, you may pay thousands of dollars later to fix even more damage later.

Should I Get Professional Help?

Depending on the source of the problem, you may have mold in places that you do not see, such as behind a wall. If you cannot find the source of the moisture intrusion causing the mold, you will need to get professional help for repairs. If the moldy area is larger than ten square feet (about 3'x3' square), you will definitely need professional help for mold removal. If the area is smaller than ten square feet, you may be able to clean it up on your own.

Preparation for Mold Cleanup

Keep anyone who might be sensitive to mold, such as those with asthma or allergies, young children, or elderly persons, away from the area that will be cleaned. Removing mold usually stirs up mold spores that can cause allergy symptoms or an asthma attack.

If possible, open the window to increase the airflow in the problem area. If mold appears inside closets, open closet doors and remove all contents. Any clothes or other fabrics from a moldy closet need to be cleaned.

Minimize exposing your skin and eyes directly to the mold or inhaling the mold spores. Contact with

1. This document is FCS 3301, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute " of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date January 2009. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>. "

2. Hyun-Jeong Lee, assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

mold or its tiny airborne spores can cause several health problems. Most importantly, avoid breathing directly on or near mold growth. Wear an N-95 respirator, waterproof gloves (e.g., rubber gloves), protective goggles, long sleeves and long pants, shoes and socks (Figure 1). You can easily purchase N-95 respirator at most hardware stores.

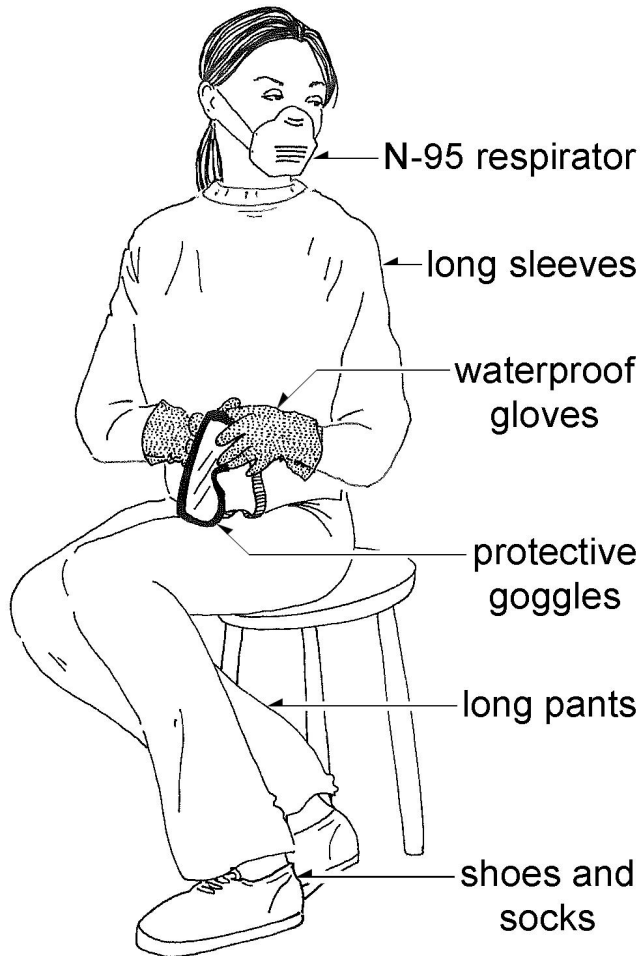


Figure 1. Protective clothes for a mold cleanup. (Original illustration by Alabama Cooperative Extension System [2006]).

Basic Mold Cleanup

Mold can grow on many different types of surfaces. The removal method will depend to some degree on the nature of the surface where the mold is growing. Generally, however, you can remove mold with a mixture of laundry detergent or dishwashing soap and water. Wearing protective gear, lightly spray the mold with water to control the dispersal of mold spores. Then remove the mold by scrubbing the moldy areas with a brush and the mild detergent

solution. After cleanup, dry the area thoroughly to prevent further mold growth. If a vacuum is necessary to remove mold or clean nearby materials, use a vacuum with a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter.

Chlorine Bleach Solution and Mold Removal

You may think of using chlorine bleach (sometimes called sodium hypochlorite) to remove mold. However, experts indicate that chlorine bleach kills mold growing on surfaces, but does not kill mold spores in the air. Dead mold spores can cause allergic reactions as well as live ones.

Furthermore, if you use chlorine bleach without caution, it can harm your health or other valuables. Chlorine bleach mixed with any product containing ammonia or acid produces a deadly toxic gas, so **NEVER mix chlorine bleach with any product that contains ammonia or acid.** Since some detergents and cleaning products contain ammonia or acid, it is recommended that you simply do not mix chlorine bleach with anything other than water.

Moldy Porous Materials

Porous materials, such as ceiling tiles, carpeting, furniture, and clothes, can easily absorb moisture, allowing mold to grow in areas that are difficult to clean thoroughly. Thorough cleaning is possible if the mold growth is limited to a few spots. You can remove the mold by scrubbing the moldy areas with a solution of detergent or soap as described above. Make sure to thoroughly dry the affected area after cleaning. The material should be discarded if there is significant mold growth. Discard porous material if the entire material was wet for more than 48 hours. Wrap the material in plastic to stop mold spores from spreading when discarding.

For More Information

For more information on mold prevention, refer to EDIS publication FCS3255/FY921 *Basic Mold Prevention*. For more information on mold and moisture control, refer to FCS3256/FY922 *Moisture Control in Your Home, Part 1: The Basics* and

FCS3257/FY923 *Moisture Control in Your Home, Part 2: Room by Room Tips.*

References and Further Resources

Alabama Cooperative Extension System (2006). Help yourself to a healthy home: *Protect your children's health*. Auburn, AL: Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M and Auburn University).

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2002). *A brief guide to mold, moisture, and your home* (EPA 402-K-02-003). Retrieved October 29, 2008, from www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (n.d.). *Mold resources*. Retrieved October 29, 2008, from www.epa.gov/mold/moldresources.html.