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Contact Person: Stephanie Johnson

Clean-up and Prevention of Mold in the Home, Post-Flood

Given the current flood circumstances in this region, the McDonough County Health Department would like to remind residents of proper mold clean-up procedures to follow after flooding and sewage back-ups.

Molds are part of the natural environment. Outdoors, molds play an important part in nature by breaking down dead organic matter such as fallen leaves and dead trees, but indoors, mold growth can be problematic. Molds reproduce by means of tiny spores that float through the air and begin growing indoors when the spores land on surfaces that are wet. There are many types of mold, and none of them will grow without moisture.

Molds produce allergens, irritants, and in some cases, potentially toxic substances (mycotoxins). Inhaling or touching mold or mold spores may cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals such as hay fever-type symptoms and skin rash (dermatitis). Allergic reactions to mold are common and range in severity.

The Health Department does not test for mold. Even if testing is done, no standards or guidelines exist to judge acceptable levels of mold.

It is important to make sure that the source of moisture is addressed before the mold is cleaned up. If this is not done, the mold will grow again. Clean-up methods for areas contaminated with mold depend on the surface where the mold is growing. A professional should be consulted if large areas (more than 30 square feet) are contaminated with mold. If the surface is non-porous (glass, plastic, varnished wood, tile, etc.), you can take the following steps:

1. Clean the surface(s): Use a non-ammonia soap or detergent in warm water and scrub the entire area affected by the mold. Use a stiff brush or cleaning pad on block walls or uneven surfaces. Rinse clean with water. Dry completely.
2. The next step is to disinfect the surfaces to help kill any mold missed by the initial cleaning: Ventilate the area before using a disinfectant. Disinfect the area with a solution of water and bleach (no more than 1 cup of bleach per 1 gallon of water). **Never mix bleach with ammonia; the vapors are hazardous.** Straight bleach will *not* be more effective. Let disinfecting areas air dry completely; use fans and dehumidifiers to speed up the process and maintain 30-50% humidity.

Tips to minimize your exposure to mold during clean-up include:

1. Minimize dust and debris when removing moldy drywall, carpet, and other materials by misting surfaces with water. Do not dry scrape or sand surfaces contaminated with mold.
2. Wear rubber gloves and protective clothing that are easily cleaned or discarded, as well as goggles and a properly fitted N95 or HEPA respirator mask. These masks can be purchased for a minimal cost at a hardware store.

Heavily damaged, porous materials (such a carpeting or drywall) that cannot be thoroughly dried and cleaned should be discarded and replaced.

For more information about mold, contact the McDonough County Health Department at (309) 837-9951 ext. 217, 220, 212, and 213 or <http://www.mchdept.com>.