



MIDDLESEX COUNTY OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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FACT SHEET

Safely Preventing Mold Growth

When returning to a home that's been flooded after natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, be aware that your house may be contaminated with mold or sewage, which can cause health risks for your family.

When You First Reenter Your Home:

- If you have standing water in your home and can turn off the main power from a dry location, then go ahead and turn off the power, even if it delays cleaning. If you must enter standing water to access the main power switch, then call an electrician to turn it off. **NEVER turn power on or off yourself or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.**
- Have an electrician check the house's electrical system before turning the power on again.
- If the house has been closed up for several days, enter briefly to open doors and windows to let the house air out for awhile (at least 30 minutes) before you stay for any length of time.
- If your home has been flooded and has been closed up for several days, presume your home has been contaminated with mold.
- If your home has been flooded, it also may be contaminated with sewage.

If there is mold growth in your home, you should clean up the mold *and* fix any water problem, such as leaks in roofs, walls, or plumbing. Controlling moisture in your home is the most critical factor for preventing mold growth.

- Clean up and dry out the building quickly (within 24 to 48 hours).
- **When in doubt, take it out!**
 - Remove all porous items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried. These items can remain a source of mold growth and should be removed from the home.
 - Porous, noncleanable items include carpeting and carpet padding, upholstery, wallpaper, drywall, floor and ceiling tiles, insulation material, some clothing, leather, paper, wood, and food.
 - Removal and cleaning are important because even dead mold may cause allergic reactions in some people.
- To *prevent* mold growth, clean wet items and surfaces with detergent and water.
- If you wish to disinfect, refer to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) document, A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home - <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html>
- Homeowners may want to temporarily store items outside of the home until insurance claims can be filed.

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Removing mold from hard surfaces:

- To *remove* mold growth from hard surfaces use commercial products, soap and water, or a bleach solution of no more than 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water.
- Use a stiff brush on rough surface materials such as concrete.

If you choose to use bleach to remove mold:

- Never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners. Mixing bleach with ammonia or other cleaning products will produce dangerous, toxic fumes
- Open windows and doors to provide fresh air.
- Wear non-porous gloves and protective eye wear.
- If the area to be cleaned is more than 10 square feet, consult the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guide titled *Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings*. Although focused on schools and commercial buildings, this document also applies to other building types.
 - You can get it free by calling the EPA Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse at: 800-438-4318, or by going to the EPA web site at http://www.epa.gov/mold/mold_remediation.html.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using bleach or any other cleaning product.
- More information on personal safety while cleaning up after a natural disaster is available at emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/workers.asp.
- If you plan to be inside the building for a while or you plan to clean up mold, you should buy an N95 mask at your local home supply store and wear it while in the building.
 - Make certain that you follow instructions on the package for fitting the mask tightly to your face.
 - If you go back into the building for a short time and are not cleaning up mold, you do not need to wear an N95 mask.

Other Mold Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Mold – General Resources: <http://www.cdc.gov/mold>
 - Clean Up Safely After a Disaster: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/cleanup>

Sources of Information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Reentering Your Flooded Home, October 27, 2004
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/reenter.asp>
 - Protect Yourself from Mold, August 25, 2006
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp>