



NEWS RELEASE

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Prompt Flood Cleanup Can Help Prevent Health Problems

BISMARCK, N.D. – Concerns about exposure to mold, which can develop following a flood, should be addressed quickly in order to prevent illness, according to Sandi Washek, environmental scientist with the North Dakota Department of Health.

When airborne mold spores are present in large numbers, they can trigger allergic reactions, asthma episodes, infections and other respiratory problems. In addition, exposure can cause development of an allergy to mold, resulting in long-term problems.

“People with asthma or pulmonary problems and those who are allergic to mold are especially vulnerable to mold-related illness,” Washek said. “It is important to clean and disinfect the contaminated area and remove the source of moisture, or mold growth will recur.”

If you can see or smell mold, a mold problem likely exists. (Mold has a musty or earthy odor.) The first step in the clean-up process is to identify the source of moisture and correct it. Then clean, disinfect and dry the moldy area following these Department of Health recommendations:

- Use a non-ammonia soap or detergent and hot water or a commercial cleaner.
- Thoroughly scrub all contaminated surfaces with the soap or detergent. (Use a stiff brush to clean masonry walls.) It is best to use an excessive amount of cleaning solution.
- Rinse all surfaces with clean water.

Moist, fibrous materials and stagnant water provide the ideal climate for mold growth. Molds can infiltrate sheet rock, carpeting and insulation. These materials generally should be discarded if they become saturated.

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After cleaning, apply a disinfectant solution of household bleach to the surface (one to two cups bleach per gallon of water). The bleach solution can be applied with a garden sprayer or wiped on with a sponge or rag. Be sure to wet the studs, wall cavities and floors thoroughly. Use a wet-dry vacuum to collect extra bleach solution. Allow the bleach solution to dry naturally for a six- to eight-hour time period. The bleach solution should not be removed or dried quickly because extended contact time is important.

- Never mix bleach with ammonia because the fumes are toxic.
- Wear eye protection and rubber gloves when working with bleach.
- Ventilate the area well by opening doors and windows.

When working around moldy areas, use respiratory protection. People vary in their susceptibility, but almost anyone who breathes enough mold spores will have an adverse reaction. Such reactions may include tightening in the chest, flu-like symptoms or even more severe reactions.

Scavenging of flood debris is strongly discouraged due to potential for disease and physical injury. Scavenging also may be prohibited by local ordinance.

Anyone who has questions about the cleanup of a flood-damaged home can contact their local public health unit or Sandi Washek, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.5188 or 1.800.755.1625.

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