



DeKalb County Cooperative Extension

MOLD CLEANUP AFTER A FLOOD

Periods of heavy rain and flooding in hot humid climates produce an explosion of mold. Molds produce spores that spread through the air and form new mold growths or colonies when the conditions are right, that is when there is moisture, nutrients (nearly anything organic) and a place to grow.

Mold can damage items in your home and impact your health. The longer you allow mold to grow, the greater the risk and the harder the cleanup. As soon as you are able to return home, start cleaning up and drying things out.

Generally, you do not need to test mold. It is better to spend your money and effort on cleaning up the mold. If you have health concerns or mold is spread throughout your home, consider hiring a reputable firm that is trained in dealing with water damage and mold remediation. There are no licensing requirements in Georgia so shop carefully, obtain written quotes and don't pay in advance of the work being performed.

You may have to do the cleanup yourself. If so, follow the steps below.

Take an inventory. If you have insurance coverage, compile a room-by-room inventory of missing or damaged goods, including manufacturer's names, dates and places of purchases and prices. Take photographs to document damages.

Dry all wet materials quickly. If possible, use air conditioning or heat with fans and dehumidifiers. If you have no power and can get access to a generator, run a dehumidifier indoors to help remove moisture from the air. New mold colonies can form in as little as 3 days if materials stay wet. Wood and other materials that look dry can still be wet enough to support re-growth.

Minimize your exposure during cleanup. Reduce your skin exposure by wearing gloves, long sleeves, long pants and sturdy shoes. To avoid breathing spores or fragments, wear a mask or N95 respirator. To help protect your eyes wear goggles.

Remove and discard moldy materials. It is best to throw out porous materials that were exposed to water. This includes carpeting, carpet pads, paper products, gypsum wallboard, insulation and plaster. These items should be covered with plastic and removed from the house. Cut away the wet wallboard and remove damp insulation. Let the area dry before sealing the wall cavity or you may have future mold problems. You

may be able to wash some textile products. Upholstered fabric furniture should be discarded if it has been sitting in water for a period of time. If it only has surface mold, then you may be able to dry it out and clean it with a HEPA filter vacuum.

Clean all surfaces. Use a non-phosphate detergent to clean surfaces (any phosphate residue is mold food). Be careful not to saturate the surface with water when removing mold from the surface. If you use a disinfectant, follow the directions carefully and never mix bleach with ammonia or acids (vinegar). If sewage entered your house, you must disinfect. Use one-half cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water. Disinfectants can kill molds, but they do not prevent re-growth.

Do the best you can to speed the drying of subfloors, slabs and wall framing before replacing insulation, wallboard and flooring. Use air conditioning, heaters, fans or a dehumidifier. Use a moisture meter to test the moisture content of studs and sheathing before replacing insulation. Wood products specialists recommend that wood has no more than 14 percent moisture by weight before you close the wall.

Remain on mold alert. Continue looking for signs of moisture or new mold growth. If mold returns, this may be a sign that the material was not dry enough or should be removed. Rebuilding and refurnishing should wait until all affected materials have dried completely.

For more information, contact your local county extension office at (404) 298-4080.