



# Mold Information

Dear Concerned Citizen:

Clark County Public Health (CCPH) does not perform in home inspections. You (*or your landlord*) may contact a third party to inspect the home. Clark County Public Health (CCPH) cannot recommend any particular companies. If you think there may be mold and/or water damage issue(s) present in the home, please refer to the internet or Yellow Pages for a listing of local companies that may be able to document mold/water damage etc. (*Keywords: "flooding", "water damage", "mold" etc.*).

Mold is caused by excessive moisture. Identifying the moisture source (*i.e. high relative humidity, leaking roof, plumbing fixtures, etc.*) will help you resolve mold issues. If there are moisture concerns in the home, CCPH encourages the use of a Relative Humidity meter (RH meter); RH meters are available at home improvement stores. An ideal range for relative humidity in the home should be between 30-50%. As an additional resource, the Northwest Clean Air Agency-Indoor Air Quality Program has produced a video that may provide guidance and help you identify sources associated with mold in the home.

**PLEASE VISIT:** <http://nwcleanairwa.gov/projects/indoor-air-quality/> (*under Videos, you will see the heading "Mold in Your Home".*)

**NOTE:** Mold observed in window sills is likely caused by condensation on the windows (*i.e. colder outdoor temperatures and warm indoor temperatures in the winter months and the opposite in the summer*). Increased air flow (*i.e. opening windows periodically, opening blinds/drapes, keeping items 3-4 inches from exterior walls etc.*) may help to alleviate this issue. Please refer to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) Mold fact sheet regarding cleaning tips for small areas. For your convenience, a copy of this information is attached. Additionally, the link to this document is provided below.

CCPH cannot provide legal advice. Please review the complete Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 59.18 Washington State Landlord-Tenant Act, to address Landlord-Tenant concerns. RCW 59.18 is available online at: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18&full=true>. Should you feel that legal action is necessary, please contact legal counsel for further guidance. Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program (CCVLP) provides free civil legal aid for low income members of our community. CCVLP can be a valuable resource to connect individuals with legal counsel regarding civil issues, such as housing related concerns. CCVLP representatives are available Monday-Friday 8AM-4:30PM at 360-695-5313, in person at 1104 Main Street, Plaza One, Vancouver, WA 98660 or via email at [info@ccvlp.org](mailto:info@ccvlp.org). Additionally, Northwest Justice Project's Coordinated Legal Education Advice & Referral (CLEAR) hotline provides free legal advice over the phone for low-income and senior citizen residents of Washington. Clear may also be able to refer you to a local legal aid office for additional assistance if you are not able to afford legal representation. You may contact CLEAR representatives Monday-Friday 9:15AM-12:15PM at 1-888-201-1014 or 1-888-387-7111 (for ages 60 and older). Additional information is available online at: <http://nwjustice.org/get-legal-help>.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT MOLD PLEASE VISIT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:**

**Washington State Dept of Health (DOH) Mold Information:**

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/HealthyHome/Contaminants/Mold>

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Mold Guide:** <http://www.epa.gov/mold/publications.html>

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Air Quality Guide:** <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/insidest.html>

**Washington State Landlord-Tenant Law:** <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18>

## Renters

Mold problems in buildings are a result of water and moisture problems. Renters need to operate the heating and ventilation systems to reduce water condensation. Renters need to notify landlords promptly, in writing, of any water leaks or moisture problems. If there is a water leak or moisture problem, it should be fixed by the landlord. Your local building and code enforcement official may take action if building problems are not addressed - they won't respond to mold complaints, so it's important to stress the source of the water problem.

If you rent your home, you are covered by the [Residential Landlord-Tenant Act](#). Understanding your rights and responsibilities as a renter can help you resolve problems. For informational recordings on residential landlord-tenant matters, call the State Attorney General's Office Consumerline at 1-800-692-5082, option 8.

## Landlords

Landlords are responsible for maintaining rental units, including fixing building problems such as water leaks and ventilation or heating defects which may lead to moisture problems. Landlords must notify their tenants about the health hazards associated with exposure to indoor mold and ways to control mold growth in their dwelling units. Posting this information in a visible, public location at the dwelling unit property is allowed. The following materials can fulfill the notification requirements:

- [Mold](#) - Print these frequently asked questions about mold. Available in English and Spanish.
- [Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home - EPA](#)  
Order free copies of this guide through the EPA website. Available in English (publication number: 402K02003) or Spanish (402K03008).

## Mold Guidance

- [Mold Guidance for Tenants and Landlords, Northwest Clean Air Agency \(PDF\)](#)  
Understand why mold problems start and who's responsible for fixing the problem.

## Resources for Resolving Problems

- [Landlord-Tenant, State Attorney General's Office](#)  
Tenant help resources, including legal advice.
- [Northwest Justice Project](#)  
Free legal assistance and representation to low-income people.
- [Solid Ground Tenant Services](#)  
Housing counseling services, best practices, and frequently asked question about landlord-tenant laws to help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities as a renter.
- [Washington Law Help - Housing](#)  
Resources on tenant rights and landlord repair and maintenance responsibilities. Materials in multiple languages.
- [Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#)  
Federal HUD rental housing contacts.
- [Dispute Resolution Centers, Resolution Washington](#)  
Use a neutral third-party mediator to resolve conflicts. Mediation is faster, cheaper, and often more effective than going to court.

## What are molds?

Molds are tiny microscopic organisms that digest organic matter and reproduce by releasing spores. Molds are a type of fungi and there are over 100,000 species. In nature, mold helps decompose or break-down leaves, wood and other plant debris. Molds become a problem when they go where they are not wanted and digest materials such as our homes.

## What makes molds grow in my home?

Mold enters your home as tiny spores. The spores need moisture to begin growing, digesting and destroying. Molds can grow on almost any surface, such as wood, ceiling tiles, wallpaper, paints, carpet, sheet rock, and insulation. The mold grows best when there is lots of moisture from a leaky roof, high humidity, or flood. There is no way to get rid of all molds and mold spores from your home. But you can control mold growth by keeping your home dry.

## Can I be exposed to mold?

When molds are disturbed, they release spores into the air. You can be exposed by breathing air containing these mold spores. You can also be exposed through touching moldy items, eating moldy food or accidental hand to mouth contact.

## Do molds affect my health?

Most molds do not harm healthy people. But people who have allergies or asthma may be more sensitive to molds. Sensitive people may experience skin rash, running nose, eye irritation, cough, nasal congestion, aggravation of asthma or difficulty breathing. People with an immune suppression or underlying lung disease, may be at increased risk for infections from molds. A small number of molds produce toxins called mycotoxins. When people are exposed to high levels of mold mycotoxins they may suffer toxic effects, including fatigue, nausea, headaches, and irritation to the lungs and eyes. If you or your family members have health problems that you suspect are caused by exposure to mold, you should consult with your physician.

## When is mold a problem?

You know you have mold when you smell the "musty" odor or see small black or white specks along your damp bathroom or basement walls. Some mold is hidden growing behind wall coverings or ceiling tiles. Even dry, dead mold can cause health problems, so always take precautions when you suspect mold. Mold is often found in areas where water has damaged building materials and furniture from flooding or plumbing leaks. Mold can also be found growing along walls where warm moist air condenses on cooler wall surfaces, such as inside cold exterior walls, behind dressers, headboards, and in closets where articles are stored against walls. Mold often grows in rooms with both high water usage and humidity, such as kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms, and basements. If you notice mold or know of water damaged areas in your home, it is time to take action to control its growth.

## When should I sample for mold?

You don't need to sample for mold because in most cases you can see or smell mold. Even a clean, dry house will have some mold spores, but not enough to cause health problems. If you smell mold it may be hidden behind wallpaper, in the walls or ceiling, or under the carpet. If you suspect you have hidden mold be very careful when you investigate, protect yourself from exposure in the same manner as you would for a clean-up. See the chart below.

## Can I control mold growth in my home?

Yes you can. Dry out the house and fix any moisture problems in your home:

- Stop water leaks, repair leaky roofs and plumbing. Keep water away from concrete slabs and basement walls.
- Open windows and doors to increase air flow in your home, especially along the inside of exterior walls. Use a fan if there are no windows available.
- Make sure that warm air flows into all areas of the home. Move large objects a few inches away from the inside of exterior walls to increase air circulation.
- Install and use exhaust fans in bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry rooms.
- Ventilate and insulate attic and crawl spaces. Use heavy plastic to cover earth floors in crawl spaces.
- Clean and dry water damaged carpets, clothing, bedding, and upholstered furniture within 24 to 48 hours, or consider removing and replacing damaged furnishings.
- Vacuum and clean your home regularly to remove mold spores.
- Check around your windows for signs of condensation and water droplets. Wipe them up right away so mold can't start to grow.

## What can I use to clean up mold?

Clean up mold and take care of the problem by following the advice above to keep your home dry and keep mold out. Act fast! Mold damages your home as it grows. Clean it up as soon as possible. [www.doh.wa.gov/mold](http://www.doh.wa.gov/mold)

### Size the Moldy Area

Decide if you have a large or small area of mold. A small area is less than about ten square feet, or a patch three feet by three feet square. To clean a small area, follow the advice below. You may use a cotton face mask for protection. If you have a lot of mold damage (more than ten square feet) consider hiring a cleaning professional. If the moldy area has been contaminated by sewage or is in hidden places, hire a professional. To find a professional, check under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration" in your Yellow Pages.

If you decide to clean up on your own, follow the guidance below:

**Use Protection-** Wear goggles, gloves, and breathing protection while working in the area. For large consolidated areas of mold growth, you should wear an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) approved particle mask.

**Seal the Area-** Seal off area from the rest of your home. Cover heat registers or ventilation ducts/grills. Open a window before you start to clean up.

**Remove Items-** Remove all your furnishings to a mold-free area. Clean the surrounding moldy area then follow cleaning directions below for the items you removed and the new space.

**Bag Moldy Trash-** Bag all moldy materials and tie off the top of the bag. Bring them outdoors and place in your garbage container right away.

### Scrub Surfaces-

- First, wash with a mild detergent solution, such as laundry detergent and warm water. Allow to dry.
- (optional step) Wipe with a solution of ¼ cup bleach to one gallon of water. Wait 20 minutes and repeat. Wait another 20 minutes.
- Last, apply a borate-based detergent solution and don't rinse. This will help prevent mold from growing again. A borate-based laundry or dish washer detergent has "borate" listed on the ingredients label.

**Clean and Wash-** Give the entire area a good cleaning, vacuum floors, & wash any exposed bedding or clothing.

**Monitor-** Check regularly to make sure mold has not returned to the clean-up area.

## What cleans moldy furniture and other items?

- For wood, metal, plastic, glass, ceramics, and other objects that don't absorb water but are washable - wipe them with a solution of lukewarm water and laundry detergent.
- For clothes, bedding, and other materials that absorb water and are washable - wash them in the laundry.
- For beds, sofas, and other furniture that absorb water but are not washable - these items may need to be discarded. Or, try to save them by vacuuming well and allowing to air out. If there is no odor it may be okay. Mold can come back, so watch for any mold growth or mold related health problems. Discard the item if you suspect mold is growing inside or outside the item.

## Should I paint over mold?

No. Don't paint or caulk over mold. The mold will grow under the paint and the paint will peel.

## I'm a renter or landlord, what help can you provide for a mold problem?

Mold problems in buildings are a result of water and moisture problems. Excess moisture comes from leaks or condensation. Tenants and landlords both have responsibilities for addressing water and moisture problems that can cause mold. Generally, fixing leaks is the landlord's responsibility and reducing condensation is the renter's responsibility. See our mold resources for renters and landlords ([www.doh.wa.gov/rentermold](http://www.doh.wa.gov/rentermold)).

## Who are my local contacts for more information about mold?

In Washington, you can contact your local county health department ([www.doh.wa.gov/localhealth](http://www.doh.wa.gov/localhealth)) for more information about mold. If you live outside of Washington State, try contacting your county or state health department.

## More Information

- Mold and Indoor Air Quality Information Line: 360-236-3090
- Mold, CDC ([www.cdc.gov/mold](http://www.cdc.gov/mold))
- Mold, EPA ([www.epa.gov/mold](http://www.epa.gov/mold))

# NOTICE REQUESTING REPAIRS

Date:

Landlord's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Landlord's Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

**RE: REPAIRS REQUESTED AT SITE ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

This is to notify you that the rental unit at which you manage and which I occupy needs repairs for the following defects. I am also including a good faith estimate of the cost of these repairs:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

The Washington Residential Landlord Tenant Act requires that the landlord begin to make repairs requested by a tenant within a specific time period as follows:

1. Twenty-four (24) hours to repair the loss of hot or cold water, heat or electricity, or a condition imminently hazardous to life.
2. Seventy-two (72) hours when the defect deprives the tenant of the use of a refrigerator, range and oven, or a major plumbing fixture supplied by the landlord.
3. Ten (10) days in all other cases.

A list of landlord responsibilities required by the act is attached. If the repairs are not completed within the applicable period of time, I intend to use the remedies provided in the Landlord-Tenant Act.

Sincerely,

(sign your name)  
(print your name)