



Mold Clean Up, Step-by-Step

Mold illness can be sneaky and symptoms may seemingly come from nowhere. Mold illness symptoms can range from low level and feel like a bout of flu you can't shake to debilitating fatigue that makes getting through the day tough.

When you Google for more information, all you find are dramatic photographs of black mold – something you just don't see in your home. It's important to know that not all mold can be seen by the human eye.

Let's look at ways to clean up harmful mold and reduce its impact on your life.

Targeting the Underlying Cause of Mold

Mold thrives in moist and warm conditions. When these conditions combine with a suitable food source, mold can spread very quickly, often in unseen places. Mold easily lives on paper, cardboard, wood, fabric, carpet, drywall, and many other common building materials.

The underlying causes of mold include:

- **Moisture:** Ensure any water pipe or roof leaks are fixed. If the property has a history of flooding, you need to evaluate the risk of it happening again and maybe even consider a house move. Extensive flooding increases the risk of mold contamination. I recommend removing wet carpet from your property as soon as possible, as they encourage not only the growth of mold but also bacteria.
- **Holes and gaps in the walls:** Look out for cracks in walls or windows – they may be letting mold in through your external walls.
- **Condensation:** If the warm air inside your property hits a colder surface, like your windows, it causes interior condensation. This often leads to mold eating away at wooden window frames. To specifically target your windowsills, moisture eliminator products are useful. However, if you suspect mold elsewhere in your house, they won't be effective.
- **Air Conditioning units:** Your air conditioning, heating, and ventilation unit need regular maintenance and cleaning to ensure that it is not the culprit. It could be circulating fungus spores around the house. Get an expert to look into it and consider getting a HEPA air scrubber to clean the air.
- **Humidity:** I advise you purchase one or more dehumidifier units, depending on the size of your home. A dehumidifier ensures you can keep the humidity of your property around the 50% mark – mold finds it harder to multiply in drier air.

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If this list seems intimidating, bear in mind you can hire a remediation company to assess, contain, and remove the mold. Make sure you pick a company certified in mold remediation.

Removing Mold From Your Carpet

Mold loves fabric, making most furniture a potential hub for mold. If you are cleaning up after a large leak, I recommend removing the carpet completely. In mold infestation cases where the carpet has not gotten wet, it's a good idea to buy a high-efficiency particulate arrestance (HEPA) vacuum cleaner to clean your carpet.

You must choose a true HEPA vacuum cleaner, not one that is labeled 'HEPA like.' HEPA vacuum cleaners utilize a strong motor and fine filter to suck up everything, including mold spores, whereas regular vacuum cleaners suck up the mold spores – only to deposit them back into the air.

When using your true HEPA vacuum cleaner:

1. Make sure you vacuum from every angle. When vacuuming it's easy to get into the habit of pushing the machine across your carpet in the same direction. Many modern vacuum cleaners have a more flexible design, meant to get into difficult corners or underneath furniture. Use it from every direction possible to remove as many mold spores as possible.
2. Empty your vacuum cleaner outside. If your vacuum model is bagless, use a disposable wipe to clean out the canister fully. Avoid breathing in the dust by wearing an N-95 respirator. If your vacuum cleaner uses bags, ensure you wear protective gloves, respirator, and clothing as you do so to avoid carrying the spores back into your home.
3. As the dirt, dust and mold spores in the fibers may have been accumulating for years, don't be disheartened if you don't see an immediate improvement in the state of the carpet or your health. It may take several long sessions of vacuuming before you start to feel the benefits.

Removing Mold From Your Clothes and Soft Furnishings

Mold removal is not straightforward when it comes to soft furnishings and clothes. If you use biocides such as diluted bleach and vinegar, the mold on the fabric dies, but the mycotoxins continue to be an allergen. It is not enough to kill the mold, it needs to be completely removed.

Also, using harsh chemicals such as bleach on fabrics is hardly ideal. Unfortunately, wiping upholstery doesn't remove the mold from the stuffing inside. And dry cleaning can cause cross-contamination from other sources.

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Instead, I recommend borax, also known as sodium borate which is a mineral and a completely natural solution for cleaning mold. Borax also combats bacteria.

Mix 1 cup of borax to 1 gallon of water and soak your clothes for half an hour before putting them in in the wash. Borax works well on mold because it's alkaline, making an inhospitable place for the mold, which prefers a lower pH environment. You must take care when using it – always wash your hands after handling clothes that have been treated with it and avoid getting it in your mouth or eyes.

Removing Mold From Your Wooden Furniture, Walls, and Other Surfaces

Mold loves hard surfaces, especially wood or plaster. Luckily, borax is suitable for most furniture.

Be wary of the claims made by most household cleaners – just because a surface is sparkling and clean looking, it's no indication of how many mold spores are still stuck to it. I recommend the following procedure for a surface that may have been contaminated:

- Use two rounds of disposable wipes to clean the surface.
- Move on to using a dry microfiber cloth to wipe up any excess moisture and mold spores.
- Throw the disposable wipes in the garbage – being careful to avoid cross-contamination of your clothes.
- The microfiber cloths can be washed on a hot wash cycle and reused. They are also more effective for everyday cleaning, wet or dry.

Of course, some surfaces are more of a challenge to clean. Mold spores stick easily to surfaces in the kitchen that tend to be coated in grease or cooking oil. I recommend that you cut through the grease with a simple soap or detergent, before using borax or the wet and dry cloth method.

Mold and Your Prized Possessions

If you or a loved one have been diagnosed with a mold-related illness, your doctor may have suggested you remove all items likely to be contaminated – including most of your possessions. While your doctor is interested in your wellbeing, the thought of removing all your favorite things may feel unbearable. There is also no guarantee that all of your possessions contain mold or mold spores. So it's important to make well-informed choices.

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Mold and Your Prized Possessions (continued...)

Possessions you can clean and keep:

Non-porous items, e.g metals, glass:

- Jewelry
- Pottery
- Glassware
- Plates and dishes
- Cutlery
- Leather

Decorations:

- Framed artwork (remove from frame, dust and reframe)

Possessions that require more thought:

- Anything made of paper
- Paperwork & important documents
- Books
- Photos
- Old letters
- Yearbooks

Books and paperwork are hard to clean adequately and book conservationists recommend wearing protective clothing and masks when handling mold-damaged books. It may be time for you to go digital. Photos, old letters, and yearbooks can also be digitalized, saving you from heartache.

Rugs and furnishings:

- Antique rugs
- Bed, mattress, pillows, bedding
- Taxidermy
- Indoor plants
- Holiday decorations

You need to replace your bed completely, as it is the only way to make sure you're not exposed to mold in your sleep. Indoor plants and taxidermy are prime sources for mildew. Antique rugs are just as bad as a carpet for attracting mold and are harder to clean.

Non-washable clothes and accessories:

- Shoes
- Bags
- Dry clean only items
- Non-waterproof watches



Mold and Your Prized Possessions (continued...)

Toys:

- Stuffed animals
- Plastic toys that are difficult to clean adequately

Whether it's your childhood bear or a recent addition to your child's collection of toys, it is unlikely that a spin in the washer removes mold spores or toxins.

Home Appliances & Electricals:

- Refrigerator
- Washer and dryer
- Air conditioner or purifier
- Home computer or laptop
- Televisions and stereos

Washers and dryers are often a source of cross-contamination, as mold can grow inside the drum. It is difficult to clean the back of refrigerators properly. Modern electronics are hard to clean inside and a compromised computer often blows out mold spores whenever the fan starts up. An air conditioner or purifier can also cause contamination when brought into a clean environment.

Open Consumables:

- Open food packets
- Jars of rice, flour, spices etc
- Open cosmetics and toiletries

Whatever you decide, you'll need to clean and store many of your possessions in sealed boxes in a place external location from your home while you work on your mold issue. It's possible that you will need a few months to sort through your possessions.

Avoiding Mold Cross-Contamination

I touched upon cross-contamination in relation to removing personal items, but there are many ways you can avoid contaminating your home once you have removed the mold. Some of these actions may seem extreme, but it's the only way to ensure that your mold illness doesn't come back.

1. Reintroduce cleaned possessions into your home slowly, over a period of months, to ensure that each item is mold free.

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Avoiding Mold Cross-Contamination (continued...)

2. Domestic dogs or cats need to be boarded elsewhere. They need to be washed fully with an antifungal shampoo and shaved before they can return to the household.
3. When cleaning possessions, surfaces, or removing the contents of your vacuum cleaner, do so outside, wearing protective gloves, a N-95 respirator, and protective clothing. Never walk into your property wearing this protection, as it could cause cross-contamination.
4. Wrap everything you intend to remove from your home in plastic bags – doubled up.
5. If you suspect a second source of mold contamination (ie. your office) you can use a mold spray such as Concrobium or EC3 Mold Solution on your clothes and everyday belongings to avoid cross-contamination.
6. Remember that certain items can survive mold spray decontamination better than others – avoid bringing papers, books, used computers, and soft furnishings that may already be compromised into the house.

Above all, though it can be tempting to make a number of huge changes all at once, I recommend consulting a doctor that specializes in mold illness and taking action a little at a time. I hope this helps you know exactly what to do in the case of mold.

UP NEXT: The Low Mold Diet