
Mould removal at home

Summary

While undisturbed mould is not a major health hazard for most people, there are some important safety tips to follow when trying to remove mould. There are also some easy steps to take to reduce the chance of mould regrowth.

Safety considerations with mould removal

Some people should not remove or be present when mould is removed, including pregnant women, children and people with weakened immune systems or chronic lung diseases, such as chronic obstructive lung disease.

If you are allergic or sensitive to mould, you may develop a stuffy nose, irritated eyes, wheezing or difficulty with breathing or skin irritation. People with weakened immune systems and with chronic lung diseases may be susceptible to infections.

Do not dry brush the mouldy area, as the brush can flick spores into the air where they may be breathed in. If you vacuum mould-affected areas, only vacuum using a HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filter. A HEPA filter is a type of filter that can trap large amounts of very small particles, which other vacuum cleaners would simply put back into the air.

If you've decided to remove mould, make sure there is good ventilation and wear protective clothing, such as a shower cap, rubber gloves, eye protection, overalls, suitable footwear and a P1 or P2 face mask (available from your hardware store).

Before deciding to wear a face mask, consider that:

- They can be hot and uncomfortable to wear.
- If the seal around the face and mouth is poor (for example, people with beards may not get a good seal), the face mask is much less effective.
- They can make it harder for you to breathe normally, so anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition should seek medical advice before using them.

If you are asthmatic and intend to do the clean-up work, keep your asthma medication with you at all times. If you show any signs of asthma, get some fresh air and follow your asthma action plan.

Steps for mould removal at home

There are three steps you can take when removing mould at home, including removing the source of moisture, removing the mould and preventing mould regrowth.

Remove the source of moisture

Mould will only grow in damp unventilated rooms. Check for sources of water from damaged pipes and drains and call a plumber if repairs are required.

Remove the mould

Wash clothing, bedding and other soft fabric articles, such as soft toys, in a washing machine on a hot cycle. Wash all the clothes you used for cleaning up separately to other clothes.

Other contaminated soft furnishings that cannot be put in a washing machine will have to be cleaned professionally. If this is not possible, they may need to be thrown out.

Thoroughly clean all affected hard surfaces. In many cases, household detergent can do the job if it is used correctly. Check the product's label to see how much to use and on which surfaces they can be used. Do not mix detergents with bleaches, together in the same bucket, as this may release hazardous fumes. Apply the cleaner and give it time to work before you mop or sponge it up.

After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with an antibacterial disinfectant to kill germs and to remove any smells.

Prevent mould regrowth

Mould sometimes grows back after cleaning. If small areas of regrowth occur, treat them with either:

- vinegar solution (one part vinegar to three parts water)
- tea tree oil (two teaspoons in two cups in water)
- hydrogen peroxide solution (use as per label directions).

If large areas of mould regrowth occur, consult a mould remediation professional.

To reduce the chance of mould regrowth, it is important to dry the area where the mould grew. The simplest way to dry a room is to open doors and windows to thoroughly air the house.

Portable mechanical heaters (available from equipment hirers) can be used. However, if you dry out a flood-affected area too quickly, there is a risk of damage to the building, so seek professional advice from a building surveyor if you intend to use mechanical dryers.

Remember that petrol or diesel generators or outdoor gas heaters should never be used indoors.

If the area has been subject to flooding, it may be necessary to remove the wall lining (plaster) to allow for proper drying of the internal walls.

For further information and advice, contact the Environmental Health section of your local council.

Where to get help

- State Emergency Service Victoria (SES) Tel. 132 500 – for emergency flood or storm assistance
- SES Victoria Flood and Storm Information Line Tel. 1300 842 737
- Environmental health section of your local council

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