WASHINGTON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

MOLD

The health department sometimes receives questions about mold. Mold is a fungus that can be found both indoors and outdoors. Molds grow best in warm, damp, and humid conditions, and spread and reproduce by making spores. Molds must have moisture to grow. Mold spores can survive harsh environmental conditions, such as dry conditions, that do not support normal mold growth.

Mold grows well on paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles, and wood products. Mold can also grow in dust, paint, wallpaper, insulation, drywall, carpet, fabric, and upholstery. Mold can enter a home carried by the air or on objects, pets or clothing. Mold spores are nearly everywhere. When these mold spores find moisture and a source of nutrients they will grow and reproduce.

Some people are much more sensitive to mold than are others. Mold can cause symptoms such as nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, wheezing, or skin irritation. Some people, such as those with serious allergies to molds, may have more severe reactions. Individuals with concerns about health issues related to mold should consult their family health care provider.

Actions that can be taken to control mold in a residence include:

Promptly fix leaky roofs, windows, and pipes. (Mold will re-appear if the leak is not first repaired.)
After flooding, clean up and dry the home thoroughly and quickly (within 24-48 hours).
Keep the humidity level in the house between 40 % and 60 %.
Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier during humid months.
Be sure the home has adequate ventilation. Use exhaust fans which vent outside the home in the kitchen and bathroom. The clothes dryer should vent outside the home.
Add mold inhibitors to paint before application.
Clean bathrooms with mold killing products.
Do not carpet bathrooms and basements.
Remove or replace previously soaked carpets and upholstery.
Diluted bleach can be used to clean mold off hard things like floors, stoves, sinks, certain toys, countertops, flatware, plates, and tools. Remember bleach is an oxidant and can remove color from items or can otherwise damage them. Wood that has been treated with wood stain or similar chemicals may be damaged with bleach. Valuable items that would be damaged with bleach can sometimes be cleaned with alcohol wipes or with soap and water followed by rinsing with clean water. These items should be dried as quickly as possible.

If you choose to use bleach to clean up mold:

Never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners. Mixing bleach with ammonia or other cleaning products will produce dangerous, toxic fumes.  
Open windows and doors to provide fresh air.  
Wear non-porous gloves and protective eye wear.  
Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions when using bleach or any other cleaning product.  
Mix no more than one cup of bleach in one gallon of water.  
Wash the item with the bleach and water mixture.  
If the surface of the item is rough, scrub the surface with a stiff brush.  
Rinse the item with clean water.  
Dry the item or leave it out to dry.

It is often better to remove and replace any paper-based building products that have been heavily damaged by mold. This could include drywall, ceiling tiles, cellulose insulation, and fiberglass insulation. Carpeting that has been heavily infested with mold can be very difficult to clean and may need to be removed.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not recommend that mold be tested to determine what type it is. No matter what type of mold is present, it should be removed. Standards for judging what is acceptable or normal have not been established.

Tenants who feel their landlord has been unresponsive can file a consumer complaint with the Missouri Attorney General’s Office. The telephone number is 800-392-8222. Tenants within the City of Potosi can contact the Potosi Building Commissioner at 573-438-2767.

Additional information is available at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site which is www.cdc.gov.