

Respiratory Concerns and Mold Cleanup After Hurricane Sandy



Hurricane Sandy left some New York homes with major damage, many from floodwaters. With moist conditions, mold spores can grow and multiply. Extensive mold contamination can cause health effects in some people. The most common are allergic reactions such as hay fever or asthma, and eye, nose, throat or lung irritation. People who already have allergies and asthma may be more likely to have health problems. The information below will help you learn how to clean mold, who should clean mold, and how to protect yourself during mold cleanup.

Recognizing Mold

- Mold comes in many different colors, may look furry, slimy, or powdery, and often smells musty, stale, or earthy. The type of mold present does not affect how it should be cleaned. If you can see or smell mold, assume you have a mold problem. Don't waste your money on air testing, because mold spores are always in the air.
- Mold can grow on ceiling tiles, wood products, paint, wallpaper, carpeting, sheetrock, clothing, furniture and other materials. Aside from obvious areas where mold is visible, inspect hidden areas for discoloration, mold growth and odors, such as crawl spaces, attics, and behind wallboards or paneling. Look also at carpet backing and padding, wallpaper, moldings (e.g., baseboards), and insulation.
- Check the home's exterior and under/behind siding to look for damage and wetness. You may have to remove the siding to allow the structure to dry out thoroughly.



What to do About Mold in Flood Damaged Homes

- Protect yourself by wearing an N95 dust mask (available at hardware stores) rubber gloves, and washable work clothes when doing repairs.
- Isolate wet/moldy/work areas from living areas.
- Ventilate the work area with open windows and fans.
- Remove wet sheetrock, carpeting, furnishings and other building materials to prevent mold growth.
- Reduce dust by wetting down flood and mold-damaged materials before removal and disposal.

- Clean off mold from metal, glass and other hard surfaces with water and detergent, such as liquid dish detergent.
- Use dilute bleach on surfaces contacted by flood waters or sewage. Use three tablespoons of unscented chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Do not use full strength bleach or mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaning products – this can cause hazardous fumes.
- Dry out your home before replacing walls and flooring. Use dehumidifiers, ventilation and heating.
- Consider getting professional help if you have a large mold problem or are highly sensitive to mold.

Common Symptoms of Mold Exposure:

- Nasal and sinus congestion
- Eye irritation, such as itchy, red, watery eyes
- Respiratory problems, such as wheezing and difficulty breathing
- Cough
- Throat irritation
- Skin irritation, such as a rash
- Headache

Exposure to high amounts of mold is not healthy for anyone. However, some individuals may be more susceptible to health problems from mold exposure. These include:

- Individuals with current respiratory sensitivities (e.g., allergies, asthma, or emphysema)
- Individuals with a compromised immune system (e.g., HIV/AIDS infection, organ transplant patients, or chemotherapy patients)

About Asthma:

Dust and other indoor irritants can make asthma worse. People may also not be able to take their usual asthma medication due to the storm, which can lead to asthma attacks. If you have asthma or allergies:

- Make sure you or your children take prescribed medications.
- Avoid tobacco smoke, dust and other irritants as much as possible.
- Get your annual influenza vaccine.
- If you have asthma, follow your treatment plan to help keep it under control.
- See your doctor if you are having health problems.

More information:

New York State Department of Health
health.ny.gov
 518-402-7530 or 1-800-458-1158

New York State Governor's Hurricane Sandy Website
www.governor.ny.gov
 1-255-NYS-SANDY (1-855-697-7263)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
 1-800-621-3362