

**What is mold?** Molds are fungi: simple, microscopic organisms, present virtually everywhere, indoors and outdoors. They can grow on virtually any substance, providing moisture is present. There are molds that can grow on wood, paper, carpet and foods. Molds are needed to break down dead material and recycle nutrients in the environment. Mold growth on surfaces can often be seen in the form of discoloration, frequently green, gray, brown, or black, but also white and other colors. Molds release countless tiny, lightweight spores, which travel through the air.

**How am I exposed to indoor mold?** It is common to find mold spores in the air inside buildings and on most indoor surfaces including clothes, walls, and furniture. Most of the time mold spores found indoors come from outdoor sources. Frequent cleaning of your room/unit and furnishings helps keep these levels low. Cleaning small areas of visible mold, such as mold that may occur around your shower, is necessary to prevent unsanitary conditions.

**Where does mold grow?** Molds are found in virtually every environment and can be detected, both indoors and outdoors, year round. For molds to grow and reproduce, they need only a food source (any organic material, such as leaves, wood, paper, or dirt) and moisture. Outdoors they can be found in shady, damp areas or places where leaves or other vegetation is decomposing. Indoors they can be found where humidity levels are high, such as basements or showers.

Molds will grow and multiply whenever conditions are right. Be on the lookout for common sources of indoor moisture that may lead to mold problems:

- Flooding
- Leaking roofs or windows
- Water sprinkler spraying onto buildings
- Plumbing leaks
- Overflow from sinks or toilets
- Moldy shower curtain
- Damp basement or crawl space
- Steam from shower or cooking
- Humidifiers or air diffusers
- Wet clothing drying indoors or clothes dryers exhausting indoors
- Discoloration of walls and ceilings can be an indication of moisture problems
- Weather conditions: heavy or flooding rains, large snowfall, high outdoor humidity

**Can mold become a problem in my room?** Yes, indoor mold contamination can be extensive and can cause high and persistent airborne spore exposures. Persons exposed to high levels can become sensitized and develop allergies to the mold or other health problems. Mold growth can damage your furnishings, carpets, and cabinets. Clothes and shoes in damp closets can become soiled.

**Health Effects** The vast majority of people are exposed to small amounts of mold or their spores on a daily basis without evident harm. However, mold growth inside a room is an unsanitary condition that may present potential health risks to any occupants. Therefore, it is always best to identify and correct high moisture conditions quickly before mold grows and possible health problems develop.

**How can I tell if I have mold in my room?** You may suspect that you have mold if you see discolored patches, cottony or speckled growth on walls or furniture, or if you smell an earthy or musty odor. Evidence of past or on-going water damage should also trigger a more thorough inspection. You may find mold growth underneath water-damaged surfaces or on walls, floors, or ceilings. Mold can often be confused with dirt and dust build up. If any type of mold is suspected, please alert the appropriate Facilities Management Office and their trained staff will conduct and evaluation.

#### **How can I prevent indoor mold problems in my living space?**

Here are some suggestions:

- Report any water or moisture issues immediately. This includes any leaks behind a toilet or under sinks, dripping faucets, wet carpet, leak from a ceiling or air vent, moisture under tiles.
- If your bathroom is equipped with an exhaust fan, be sure to turn it on when taking a bath or showering, and leave it on until the bath/shower is over and all steam has left the room. Steam from a shower can also cause the fire alarm to activate.
- When you do use the shower, make sure to use a shower curtain and keep the curtain inside of the bath/shower to prevent water from collecting on the floor.

- After using the shower, it is best practice to pull the shower curtain across the tub/shower enclosure so that it has plenty of space to dry. Leaving the curtain bunched together does not allow it to dry properly, and encourages mold growth.
- If your room/unit is equipped with a ceiling fan, please leave it on LOW. This helps circulate the air, which in turn, helps to dehumidify the area.
- It is important to inspect your shower curtain for mold. If you do find mold on your shower curtain, please clean it with a shower cleaner, launder it if it can be washed and dried, or remove it and install a new one.
- Whether you are cooking in your apartment or in a community kitchen, please use the exhaust hood above the stove. This will assist in removing steam and moisture from the area.
- Set the thermostat in your room to AUTO. This allows the unit to circulate on and off and function properly.
- OSU Housing and Residential Life recommends a temperature range of 70-75 degrees year-round.
- If you wish to maximize energy savings, OSU Energy Guidelines recommend a temperature range of 74-78 degrees during times when cooling is needed, and 68-72 during times you need heating. You are encouraged to follow the OSU Energy Guidelines whenever possible, especially during times you are away from your room for class, work, weekends, and University holidays.
- Never open windows while heating and cooling units are in operation. This may cause condensation which could contribute to mold and mildew growth. It can also cause the units to break and not function properly or at all.
- Bathrooms need to be cleaned on a regular basis so that there is not an increase in the rate of mold growth.
- Clean your room/unit regularly including taking out the trash and cleaning the refrigerator.
- Pick up wet towels or clothing. Don't put them on the floor.
- Clean up all liquid spills quickly and thoroughly.
- Inspect the room regularly for indications and sources of indoor moisture and mold, including closets, cabinets, under beds or desks, under sinks, or other areas with limited air circulation.
- Whenever possible, move wet items to a dry and well ventilated area or outside to expedite the drying process. If you come in from the rain, please don't put your wet shoes on the carpet or in a dark closet or corner.
- Remove wet rugs as soon as possible.
- Limit live plants or have none at all, especially if you have allergies. If a plant dies remove it as soon as possible as dead/decomposing plants can cause air quality issues.
- Housing and Residential Life allows for a 20-gallon fish tank. However, since the additional water does contribute to humidity and moisture issues, we ask you to consider this impact if you opt to have a tank. *(This amount is dropping to a 10-gallon tank beginning the Fall 2020 semester.)*

#### **University Housing and Residential Life Procedures**

Upon reports of suspected mold, Housing and Residential Life will coordinate with OSU Facilities Management. The process includes:

- A visual assessment will be performed.
- If needed, Facilities Staff may perform the following steps:
  - Clean, repair, or replace the heating/air conditioning unit
  - Repair plumbing and stop leaks
  - Seal any leaking doors or windows
  - Clean and disinfect the area
  - Train residents on proper cleaning techniques or how to properly operate the thermostat and HVAC system
- Moisture and humidity levels may be tested. If signs of abnormally high humidity or moisture are encountered a more thorough assessment may be performed.
- A dehumidifier and/or a fan may be provided for resident use to accelerate the drying time. If one is installed in your room, it is important to leave it running at all times.

#### **To report any facility-related concern or repair:**

##### **OSU Housing and Residential Life Facilities Management**

405-744-8510

Monday-Friday, 8 am to 5 pm

##### **OSU Facilities Management**

405-744-7154

After-hours, weekends, and University Holidays