

MOULD AND YOUR HEALTH IN A DISASTER

Dealing with mould in your home after a disaster

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What is mould?

Mould is a type of fungi that grows best in damp and poorly ventilated areas, and reproduces by making spores.

Mould is a common issue in North Queensland, particularly in the summer months, due to the hot and humid climate.

Disaster events such as cyclones or floods can create excess moisture which, in conjunction with the hot and humid climate, creates an ideal environment for mould to grow.

How does mould affect people?

People can be exposed to mould through inhalation, skin contact or ingestion and may trigger nasal congestion, sneezing, coughing, wheezing, respiratory infections and worsen asthma and allergic conditions.

People with weakened immune systems, allergies, severe asthma and chronic, obstructive or allergic lung diseases are more susceptible to these symptoms and other serious health effects. People that are more susceptible should seek medical advice if they are concerned about mould in their home.

Actions you can take

If mould is a problem in your home, you need to eliminate sources of moisture and remove the mould spores. Mould removal efforts should focus on:

- removing all sources of pooled water or excessive moisture from the home.
- opening doors and windows to let the house air out for as long as possible.
- using exhaust fans or open windows in the bathroom and kitchen when showering, cooking or using the dishwasher.
- discarding all porous, wet or flood damaged items, including wallpaper, plasterboard, carpet, rugs, bedding, mattresses, furniture, stuffed toys, clothing, and other wet damaged materials that cannot be adequately dried or cleaned.
- using fans and/or air conditioners on 'dry' mode, if available. Note: If you suspect contamination with mould or floodwaters, do not use until these systems have been cleaned and checked by a qualified person.
- fixing leaking plumbing and other building faults.
- venting clothes dryers to the outside.
- reducing moisture, as mould spores need moisture to grow.
- temporarily storing damaged or discarded items outside the home (in a safe, clean, dry place such as shed or garage) until your insurance claim is processed.

Steps for cleaning mould after a disaster event

It is important to protect yourself when cleaning mould. When cleaning mould, remember to wear a shower cap, goggles and a 'P1' or 'P2' respirator.

Step 1 - Clean: In many cases, household cleaning products are suitable, if used correctly. Check the product's label to see how much to use, which surfaces they can be used on, as well as cautionary advice about mixing with other chemicals.

Step 2 - Disinfect: Disinfect surface with a disinfectant product.

It is recommended when cleaning mould to:

- use household cleaning agents, such as detergents, bleach, or a white fermented vinegar solution.
- clean and disinfect all affected surfaces inside the house and other living areas.
- wash hard surfaces and let the surface dry completely by airing or active drying (for example, fans or dehumidifiers).
- vacuum clean using a HEPA (highly efficient particulate air) filter, as it does not recirculate the air back into your home. A HEPA filter is a type of filter that can trap a large amount of very small particles.
- wash items such as towels, linen, soft toys etc. as normal (if possible). Otherwise these items could either be professionally cleaned or disposed of.



Helpful information

If the mould affected room is to be painted, you will need to clean the area and allow it to dry thoroughly before painting. Use low sheen, semi-gloss or gloss enamel rather than flat acrylic paint. Mould resistant paint and additives are available from paint stores.

- Do not mix cleaning agents, as they can produce toxic fumes.
- Do not dry brush the mouldy area as the brush can flick mould spores into the air, which may cause health problems.

If I live in a rental property which has mould, where can I go for help?

The owner should remedy mould caused by faults in gutters or other fixtures, but the tenant must ensure there is adequate ventilation throughout, to help avoid mould problems during winter. Note that the cause of the mould growth may be due to a building fault that may not be easily rectified. If you have taken measures to ensure the building is properly ventilated and mould is still growing, you should raise the issue with the landlord or rental agency.

Before cleaning or disposing of water-damaged or mould-damaged items, always seek advice from your insurance company in case they need to inspect the items.

More information

For more information on dealing with mould after a disaster, contact Council on 13 48 10 or visit Council's website at townsville.qld.gov.au.

Information about disasters in Townsville can be found on the Emergency Management and Disaster Dashboard at disaster.townsville.qld.gov.au.