

## What Is Mold?

Mold is a common type of fungus. Thousands of species of mold are found indoors and outdoors. Mold has useful functions, such as composting of vegetation and producing penicillin, an antibiotic. It grows in damp conditions and unventilated spaces, and uses wood, paper, leaves, cloth, and leather for food.

## Identification

The presence of mold can be verified by visual observation or a musty odor. There is generally no need to professionally test the mold to identify a particular type before starting clean-up efforts.

**The San Francisco Department of Public Health does not perform mold testing.**



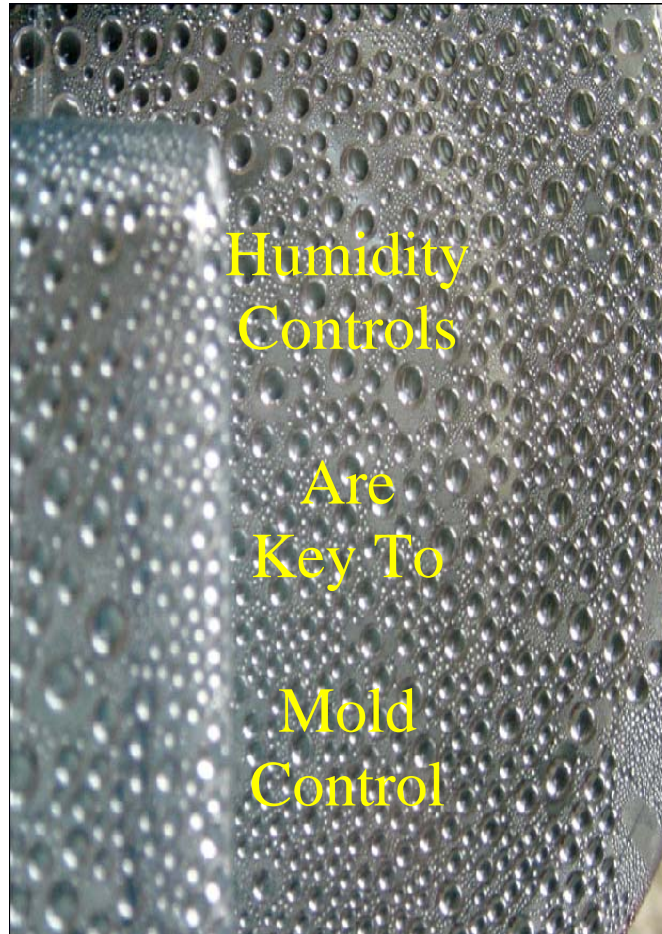
### Is Mold Dangerous to My Health?

We are all exposed to mold everyday. Significant visible indoor mold (more than a small amount on windows or bathroom tiles that cannot be controlled by routine cleaning) in homes, schools, or daycare centers is considered a Health Nuisance and a violation of the San Francisco Health Code.

Exposure to a significant amount of indoor mold over time can cause symptoms and health effects in sensitive individuals, infants and children, the elderly, immune compromised/cancer patients, and persons with respiratory conditions. Allergic reactions, such as those listed below are most common.

- Nasal and sinus congestion
- Burning, watery, and reddened eyes; blurry vision; light sensitivity
- Dry, hacking cough
- Worsening of asthma or allergy in sensitive individuals

**See your doctor if you are concerned about your symptoms.**



## Prevention/Control

The most effective method of mold control is moisture control. A “Relative Humidity” (RH) of 50% or less will reduce mold growth. RH can be measured using a hygrometer. Inexpensive hygrometers are sold at most hardware stores.

Common sources of humidity/moisture are:

- Improper repairs from prior water damages
- Leaky roofs, windows or plumbing
- Damp basements/concrete slabs
- Use of humidifiers
- Steam from cooking and showering
- Numerous plants and aquariums
- Inadequate ventilation

**To prevent excessive mold growth, building repairs may be needed and occupants may need to make some changes such as:**

- Wash mold off hard surfaces and dry completely. Absorbent materials with mold, such as ceiling tiles carpet and sheet rock, may need to be replaced
- Fix leaky plumbing or other sources of water
- Keep drip pans in your air conditioner, refrigerators, and dehumidifier clean and dry
- Ensure that exhaust fans or windows in kitchens and bathrooms are operable and use them when showering, cooking, or using the dishwasher
- Vent clothes dryers to the outside
- Maintain low indoor humidity, between 30-50% relative humidity

**Dehumidifiers** can help control relative humidity when underlying moisture sources cannot be readily eliminated. Water collection traps and hoses in the dehumidifiers **must be cleaned routinely** or they too will become a source of moisture for mold growth.

## How To Safely Remove Mold

- **Hard surfaces** such as walls, hard flooring, ceilings, glass, plastic, wooden furniture or metal may be washed.
- Use **detergent** in hot water and scrub with a stiff brush or cleaning pad on block wall or uneven surfaces where excessive mold is present. Rinse clean with water.
- Curtains, clothes, linens, and any other items that can be **laundered or dry-cleaned** may be double bagged and removed for cleaning.
- **Steam Cleaning** of carpet is adequate in some cases. Heavily contaminated carpet padding needs to be replaced. There are other treatments available for valuable items.
- Heavily contaminated **upholstered furniture, carpets, and mattresses** need to be wrapped and discarded.
- **Discard** contaminated materials that cannot be cleaned, such as paper, rags, plaster, carpet padding, etc. in double plastic bags.
- **Bleach** and other biocides are **not recommended** for cleaning up mold. (Biocides are substances that destroy living organisms such as mold.)  
Killing mold may not be enough. Dead mold may still cause allergic reactions. **Mold spores must be contained and removed.**
  - If the musty smell continues or visible mold returns, you may have to **repeat the process.**
  - Certain **mildew-retarding paints** are effective.

**Never mix bleach with other products that contain ammonia; the mixture will produce toxic vapors.**

## Code Enforcement Program

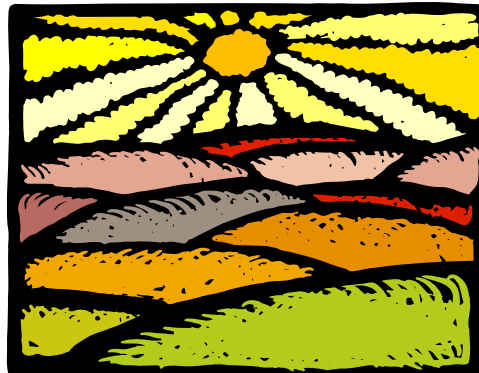
The Environmental Health (EH) Code Enforcement Program can assist you to remedy a variety of Public Health Nuisances. **The San Francisco Health Code holds property owners responsible for maintaining their property nuisance-free.** Tenants are responsible for routine housekeeping. **For information, advice, referrals, and to report a nuisance condition like large amounts of indoor mold, call the EH Code Enforcement Program at (415) 252-3805.**

An investigator will work with you to address your mold concerns.

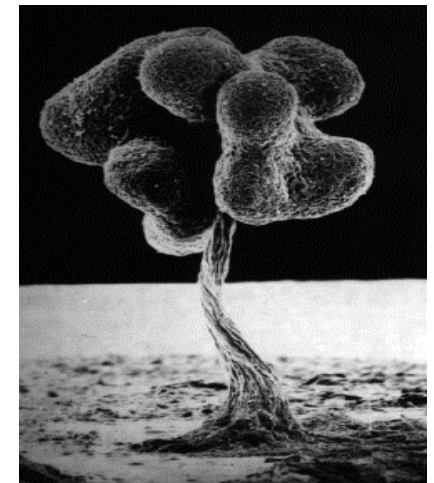
**For building structural problems, like leaks, call the Department of Building Inspection, Housing Division at (415) 558-6220.**

## Online Resources

- 1) Environmental Protection Agency  
[www.epa.gov/iedweb00/schools/tfs/guideh.html](http://www.epa.gov/iedweb00/schools/tfs/guideh.html)
- 2) California Department of Health Services  
[www.cal-iaq.org](http://www.cal-iaq.org)
- 3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



# MOLD Guidelines and Control



City & County Of San Francisco  
Department of Public Health

**Environmental Health Services**  
1390 Market Street, Suite 210  
San Francisco, CA 94102



Code Enforcement Program  
Phone: (415) 252-3805

this brochure may be downloaded at  
[www.sfdph.org/eh/pubs/mold.pdf](http://www.sfdph.org/eh/pubs/mold.pdf)