

AFTER THE FLOOD:

Cleaning Up and Preventing Mold

A building that has been flooded can be a dangerous place. This factsheet will provide information about cleaning up and making your home safe to live in again.

*We recommend that these tips be followed **to the extent possible** but acknowledge there are situations that may prevent the use of some recommended equipment or precautions.*

Key messages for safe clean up:

- Wear personal protective equipment. At a minimum, wear an N-95 mask, goggles and protective gloves. N-95 masks should only be used once and then thrown away.
- Ensure the building is completely dry and mold cleanup is complete before reentering your home.
- Moldy or mildewed items must be completely cleaned and disinfected or must be thrown away.
 - If not, mold and mildew may return and possibly cause health problems.
 - Carpet and padding cannot be cleaned – throw them away.

Protect yourself and loved ones against hazards. People with breathing problems like asthma or those who have weakened immune systems should stay away from moldy sites. Children should not take part in disaster cleanup work. Check for loose power lines or gas leaks. Make sure the electricity and gas are turned off. Look for sagging ceilings or floors or other structural problems. Watch out for wet, muddy or slippery floors.

Follow these steps for cleanup:

1. Put on the personal protective equipment described above to protect your eyes, nose, mouth and skin.
2. Remove standing water and wet materials. Use a wet vacuum to remove water from floors, carpets and hard surfaces. Dry your home and everything in it as quickly as you can – within 24 to 48 hours if possible.
3. Open all doors and windows when you are working and leave as many open as is safe when you leave.
 - a. Open inside doors, especially closets and interior rooms, to let air flow to all areas. Take doors off their hinges if needed.
 - b. Open kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanity doors; remove drawers, wipe them clean and stack them to dry.
 - c. Open the attic access to let air flow to the attic. Before you open the attic door, make sure nothing will fall on you.
4. When electricity is safe to use, use fans and dehumidifiers to remove moisture. Do not use fans if mold has already started to grow because the fans may spread the mold.
5. Clean with water and a detergent. Remove all mold you can see. **Dry right away.**

6. If you use cleaning products, do not mix cleaning products together. **DO NOT mix bleach and ammonia because it can create toxic vapors.**
7. Throw away items that can't be cleaned and dried completely within 24 to 48 hours. Carpet and padding cannot be cleaned – throw them away.
8. Painting or caulking over mold will not prevent mold from growing. Fix the water problem completely and clean up all the mold before you paint or caulk.

AM I DONE?

- If you still see or smell mold, you have more work to do. After a remediation, there should be no signs of water damage or mold growth.
- You may need to ask a mold remediation professional to know whether your mold problem is completely fixed. Sampling for mold is not usually recommended; instead, a careful inspection of the work area for completion of the cleanup and absence of mold-related odors is usually appropriate.
- If you have health problems that get worse when you return home, like asthma, allergy attacks, skin or eye irritation, you may still have some mold.

Contact information for NCDHHS Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch:

- 919-707-5900 or oeeb@dhhs.nc.gov

Contact information for county health departments:

- www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/contact/LHD

Other useful information for flood cleanup and health and safety issues:

- EPA: www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2017-08/documents/mold_homeowners_and_renters_guide_to_cleanup_after_disasters.pdf
- CDC Guidelines for Cleaning Safely After a Disaster: www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/safety/index.html
- NCDHHS: https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/oe/docs/mold_factsheet_10132023-fin.pdf
- NCDHHS: www.ncdhhs.gov/after-flood-getting-back-your-home-safely/download
- EPA: www.epa.gov/mold



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