

How to address mold after a flood

Floods can quickly turn lives upside down. According to the World Health Organization, more than two billion people were affected by floods between 1998 and 2017, and those people no doubt recognize just how unsettling floods can be.

The damage caused by flooding can linger long after water levels have subsided. Mold left in the wake of a flood poses a significant threat, and WebMD notes that mold can be especially dangerous for people with respiratory issues like allergies or asthma. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, one of the organization's chief concerns was to let those affected by the

storm learn how to safely clean up mold.

Mold cleanup must be done with a sense of urgency, as WebMD indicates that mold can grow very quickly in damp environments. That said, it's vital that homeowners only reenter flooded properties when it's safe to do so. Reentering too quickly and before government officials say it's safe to do so can put residents in serious jeopardy.

Once it's safe to reenter a home, the CDC recommends the following approaches to address mold after a flood:

- Wear personal protective equipment. Gloves, masks and goggles should be worn to protect

the eyes, nose, mouth, and skin. While personal protective equipment can be highly effective, anyone with mold allergies or preexisting respiratory conditions like asthma should leave mold clean-up to the professionals.

- Discard certain items. Items that are wet with flood water but cannot be cleaned and completely dried within 24 to 48 hours should be discarded. People with flood insurance policies may need to take photos of items prior to discarding them if they hope to be reimbursed.

- Open doors and windows. The Federal Emergency Management Agency notes that airing the home out by opening the doors

and windows can inhibit mold growth when humidity levels are lower outside than inside.

- Circulate air around the house. If it's safe to turn the electricity back on, circulate air inside the home with fans. In addition, use a dehumidifier to remove moisture from inside the home.

- Do not mix cleaning products. The CDC notes the dangers associated with mixing cleaning products. For example, mixing bleach with ammonia can produce toxic vapors.

- Scrub surfaces. Use clean water and detergent to remove all visible mold from surfaces around the house. Dry the surfac-

es immediately after cleaning them.

- Avoid refurbishing until all mold has been removed. Mold can grow even if it's been painted or caulked over. The CDC urges anyone tasked with addressing flood-related mold to make sure surfaces are completely cleaned and dried prior to refurbishing rooms.

- Dry the home as quickly as possible. Drying the home as quickly as possible, and ideally within 24 to 48 hours of the occurrence of flooding, can inhibit further mold growth. However, it's imperative that residents only reenter a home after getting the go-ahead from local authorities.

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