

Mould in the workplace

WHAT IS MOULD?

Mould is a type of fuzzy, cottony, woolly or powdery growth that thrives in moist conditions. Mould spreads by releasing tiny cells called spores into the air. It can grow on wood, drywall, fabric, wallpaper, ceiling tiles and carpeting.

Mould grows best between 5 to 38 degrees Celsius. But most of all, mould needs moisture. Mould spreads when the right temperature, food and moisture are present. The growth of mould will be slower if any one of these conditions is removed.

Mould is most often found in basements, kitchens and bathrooms. In workplaces mould may be present because of flooding, or leaks in the roof or plumbing. Mould may also be present in energy efficient buildings that do not allow enough moisture to escape.

HOW CAN MOULD AFFECT MY HEALTH?

Mould does not always create health problems. However, health

problems can occur for some people when they breathe in mould or their spores. Mould can also make symptoms worse if you already have allergies or asthma.

Many moulds make harmful poisons called toxins. If a person breathes in these toxins they may develop allergies. The toxins can also slowly weaken our bodies, leaving them open to infection especially if you have just had surgery.

What symptoms does mould create?

When mould is present you may experience any of these symptoms

- runny nose
- eye irritation
- cough
- congestion
- fatigue
- headaches
- difficulty concentrating

WHAT CAN MY EMPLOYER DO TO PREVENT MOULD BUILD-UP?

Mould can grow in almost any damp place. Employers should prevent or reduce moisture in areas where it may be a problem. Relative humidity measures the moisture in the air. Employers should keep the relative humidity of the workplace between 30 and 50 per cent by following these practices

- Use exhaust fans when cooking, dishwashing, laundering or when cleaning large areas. Vent these areas directly to the outside.
- Reduce how much water is used when cleaning carpets. Carpets should not be installed around fountains, sinks, bathtubs/showers or directly on top of concrete floors that often leak or collect water.
- Keep all heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems in good working condition.
- Empty water collectors and clean de-humidifiers regularly.

- Insulate cold surfaces to prevent condensation on piping, windows, exterior walls, roofs and floors.
- Clean up any floods or spills within 24-48 hours. Remove spots or stains immediately from floors and carpets.

WHERE SHOULD I LOOK FOR MOULD IN MY WORKPLACE?

- Look for staining of walls, ceilings and carpets. Mould will most often appear as dark spots, stains or patches. If you find a suspicious spot, check to see if it is mould by dabbing the spot with a small amount of chlorine bleach. If the colour changes or disappears, the stain is probably mould.
- Check for loose wallpaper and build-up of moisture on window sills.
- Be aware of musty or damp odours. Search for standing puddles of water in places like drip pans in the air-conditioning unit and sump pumps.
- Check air-filters for mould growth.

HOW SHOULD MOULD BE REMOVED?

It is not necessary to identify the type of mould in the workplace. All mould can be removed in the same ways.

- Get information from the Workplace Safety and Health Division of Manitoba Labour (1-800-282-8069) to deal with mould in a healthy and effective way.
- Measure the size of the mouldy area. If the area is less than 30 square feet then the workplace may decide to do the repair work themselves.
- Employers should provide training to workers on how to remove mould in a healthy way. They also need to provide appropriate respirators, gloves and eye protection for workers. A high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter respirator will provide the best protection.
- Spray the mouldy surface lightly with water before cleaning to reduce dust during repair work.

- Use trained professionals if the area is larger than 30 square feet. Ensure that the work done follows provincial guidelines from the Workplace Safety and Health Division of Manitoba Labour.

HOW CAN MY WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE HELP?

Workers and management should work together to find out if mould is a problem in your workplace. Health and safety committees should develop an action plan to deal with any mould found. They should share what they plan to do with all workers and keep workers up to date on progress made.

For more information contact

MFL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CENTRE

102 - 275 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4M6
Phone: 204-949-0811
Fax: 204-956-0848
Toll free: 1-888-843-1229
(Manitoba only)
Email: mflohc@mflohc.mb.ca
Website: www.mflohc.mb.ca

WORKPLACE SAFETY & HEALTH DIVISION

200 - 401 York Avenue
Winnipeg Manitoba R3C 0P8
Phone: 204-945-3446
Fax: 204-948-2209
Toll free: 1-800-282-8069
Website: www.gov.mb.ca/labour/safety

REMOVING MOULD

Mould can be removed in one of two ways. Either the mouldy area is removed or the mould is washed off the surface.

- Remove and replace mouldy drywall, ceiling tiles, fabric or carpet.
- Clean and re-use metal, glass, hard plastic, wood and concrete if its structure remains strong.

To clean, apply a "bleach cleanser" of one part bleach to four parts water (1:4 ratio) and a small amount of a non-ammonia based dishwashing detergent to cut surface dirt. **(Never mix chlorine bleach and ammonia!).** Check to be sure that the area is dry and there are no more stains in the work area.