After natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, excess moisture and standing water may contribute to the growth of mold and other microbial contaminants in homes and other buildings. When returning to a home that has been flooded, be aware that mold may be present and may be a health risk for you or your family.

Q: How do I know if my home has mold?

Often, mold can be seen and smelled. If you answer yes to one of the following questions, your home may have excess mold:

1. Do the walls and/or ceiling show signs of visible mold growth or water damage?
2. Do you smell a bad odor, such as a musty, earthy smell or a foul stench?

Note that mold may not always been seen or smelled, and will require testing to detect. Testing should be done by a certified industrial hygienist (CIH); a list of qualified professionals is available at https://www.aiha.org/about-ih/Pages/Find-an-Industrial-Hygienist.aspx or by contacting your local health department.

If you do choose to hire a CIH to conduct testing for mold, you may wish to ask the following questions:

1. What services do you provide?
2. Cost/Fees?
3. Can you provide a scope of work?
4. Which lab do you use and is it AIHA accredited?
5. How many projects of this nature have you performed?
6. What kind of work product do you provide?

There are also home kits available to test for mold, but more research is needed to determine the accuracy of these kits.

Top Health Considerations for Entering a Flooded Home

1. Electricity and gas should be turned off immediately to avoid shock and gas leak. (For information on how to do this, go to http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/n4540081_repairingFloodedHome.pdf).
2. Consider all mud and water that has entered the home to be contaminated. Wear personal protective equipment (preferably N95 mask or other approved respirator), gloves, glasses) as you re-enter the area and until cleanup is complete. (see ATS Patient Information Series ‘Disposable Respirators’ at www.thoracic.org/patients)
3. Soiled or saturated porous materials such as carpets, carpet pads, and furniture should be discarded to prevent mold and other microbial growth.
4. Solid materials can be cleaned with water and detergent. Use extreme caution if using bleach. Read labels on household cleaners and avoid mixing them together.
5. If you know or suspect your home contains lead or asbestos, do not attempt remediation without first calling 1-800-424-LEAD or the EPA TSCA Assistance Service at 202-554-1404 for asbestos.
6. Pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and the immunocompromised are particularly susceptible to the infectious, irritant, and inflammatory complications that may arise and should avoid the area until cleanup is complete.
7. Mold growth may be particularly hazardous for those with pre-existing allergic or other respiratory disease.
8. Should any new health symptoms arise during cleanup, the person should contact their local healthcare provider as soon as possible.
Q: Why should people with allergies or lung problems avoid mold?
People with asthma, allergies, or other respiratory conditions may be more sensitive to mold. People with immune suppression (such as people with HIV infection, cancer patients taking chemotherapy, patients on immunosuppressive medications, and people who have received an organ transplant) are more susceptible to fungal infections. Therefore, if you are allergic to mold or have asthma, being around mold may make your condition worse. **If you have a chronic lung condition or a weakened immune system, you could develop fungal infections in your lungs, and you should try to avoid buildings contaminated with mold. Even if you do not have underlying allergies or lung problems, exposure to mold can result in respiratory symptoms and lung conditions.**

Q: What are the symptoms of mold sensitivity?
Some people exposed to mold may experience stuffy nose, irritated eyes, or skin irritation. People allergic to mold may develop symptoms such as shortness of breath, wheezing or cough. People with weakened immune systems and with chronic lung diseases, such as obstructive lung disease, may develop fungal infections in their lungs. If you or your family members have health problems after exposure to mold, contact your healthcare provider.

Q: How do I prevent mold growth?
Controlling moisture in your home is the most critical factor for preventing mold growth. Clean up and dry out your home as quickly as possible using these steps:
- Open doors and windows.
- Use fans, air conditioning units, and dehumidifiers (if available).
- Clean wet items and surfaces with detergent and water.
- Remove and discard items that cannot be washed and disinfected (such as mattresses, carpeting, carpet pads, rugs, upholstered furniture, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam-rubber items, books, wall coverings, and most paper products).
- Remove and discard drywall and insulation that has been contaminated with sewage or flood waters.
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (such as flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks, and other plumbing fixtures) with hot water and laundry or dish detergent.

Q: How do I protect myself while cleaning up mold?
- Buy an N95 mask or other respirator at your local home supply store and wear it. If available, wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles (protective eyewear).
- After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Remember, if you have a chronic lung condition or a weakened immune system, you could develop fungal infections in your lungs and you should try to avoid homes or other buildings contaminated with mold.
- Never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners. Mixing bleach with ammonia or other cleaning products may produce dangerous, toxic fumes.
- Always read the labels and use cleaning products carefully.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or ill.

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Adapted from: Flood Water After a Disaster or Emergency @ https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/cleanupwater.html; Mold After a Disaster @ https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/ and Ten Things You Should Know About Mold @ https://www.epa.gov/mold/ten-things-you-should-know-about-mold

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