



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE



Keeping Safe During Flood Cleanup

The flood damaged furniture, Sheetrock, carpets and other building materials and furnishings. These are likely to now be contaminated with harmful substances, including raw sewage and now, mold.

Even entering a flood damaged home will mean exposure to mold. Exposure, even briefly, may make survivors and workers temporarily or permanently ill unless they use the right personal protective equipment, including the proper respirator.

What is mold?

Molds are tiny organisms. They are a natural part of the environment. Molds are usually present both outdoors and indoors. They are usually not harmful. However, some people get sick when they are exposed to high amounts or certain types of mold. Mold grows indoors when there is moisture (leaks, floods, high humidity) and food (anything organic, including wood, dirt, carpeting, or Sheetrock).

How does mold affect health?

Breathing in or touching mold can cause health problems. Both live mold and dead mold can cause health problems. Killing mold (for example, with bleach) does not get rid of all the health hazards. Exposure to mold can cause several types of health problems:

Irritation - burning eyes, congestion, cough, postnasal drip.

Allergy - asthma, itchy watery eyes, congestion, cough, wheezing, tightness in the chest, trouble breathing.

Poisoning and Infectious Disease - Some molds may cause serious illness or infection. (However, this does not happen often. People with compromised immune systems are most at risk.)

How can we tell if mold is present?

Even though molds can sometimes be seen or smelled, workers cannot always tell for sure whether harmful mold is present or not.



Mold thrives in wet conditions, such as is found following a flood. Here, mold grows on a wall, and a worker is wearing adequate protection for safety. Photo courtesy U.S. Environmental protection Agency.

You should assume all damaged buildings contain mold, and should wear protection to keep safe.

Use These Items to Help You Keep Safe



Worker Protection & Safe Worker Practices

The main way that mold gets into people's bodies and affects their health is by breathing it in. *Cleanup workers should always wear a respirator. Dust masks and surgical masks are not respirators. They do not protect against mold.*

Use the right respirator and filters (see below). Make sure the respirator or filter says "NIOSH approved." Learn now how to do a *seal check* each time you use the respirator. Change filters or use a new disposable N95 or N100 respirator at the beginning of each work day (or more often if necessary).

For small cleanup/rip-out jobs (example: up to 3 sheets of Sheetrock):

- Use an N95 disposable respirator (a reusable half face respirator with N95 filters is better).
- Wear protective gloves (non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber).
- Wear tight-fitting goggles designed to keep out dust (no holes or vents).

For large cleanup/rip-out jobs (example: more than 3 sheets of Sheetrock):

- Use a full-face respirator with N, R, or P100 filters (or powered air purifying respirator [PAPR] with HEPA filter).
- If a full face-respirator is not available, use an N95 disposable respirator or a reusable half face respirator with N95 filters. Also use tight-fitting goggles designed to keep out dust.
- Wear disposable protective clothing that covers the entire body, including head and shoes.
- Wear protective gloves (non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber).

For any area with known or suspected mold contamination:

- Wet down mold-contaminated surfaces to prevent mold from getting into the air.
- Use HEPA vacuum cleaners only - no dry sweeping or non-HEPA vacuums.
- Place used disposable personal protective equipment in a secured bag and discard.
- Clean reusable personal protective equipment before reusing.
- Wash hands and face with soap and clean water before eating or smoking.
- Shower with soap and clean water before driving or returning home.
- Wash personal clothing that may contain mold or other contaminants separately.
- Be aware that you may also be exposed to harmful chemicals like asbestos and lead.
- These may require additional protection.