

Advice for Residents with Mold Complaints

Do you think you have mold in your home or rental unit? Do you want to know what Tri-County Health Department staff can do to help you resolve this problem? The information below will answer your questions.

If you or your family members have symptoms, be aware that there is a lot of false information on the internet regarding symptoms related to mold exposure. To date, research^a has indicated there is sufficient evidence of an association (but not a causal relationship) between exposure to mold and/or damp indoor environments and the following symptoms:

- Upper respiratory (nasal and throat) tract symptoms
- Cough
- Wheeze
- Asthma symptoms in sensitized asthmatic persons

If your family members have any other symptoms, something other than mold may be causing them.

- 1) Was there a recent (within the last few months)^b water leak into your home?
 - a. If your answer is “yes”, was there standing water for at least 48 hours?
 - i. If “yes”, go to 2).
 - b. If your answer is “no”, be aware that mold requires water to grow or high humidity levels (above 60%). Note that in Colorado, it is rare for humidity levels to be above 60% for very long, so normally a water leak would be essential for mold growth.
 - c. If your answer is “maybe” or “I don’t know”, go to 2).
- 2) Can you see or smell mold?
 - a. If your answer is “yes”, go to 3).
 - b. If your answer is “no”, you should know that if mold is present, you can usually see it or smell it. (Mold has a musty odor; it can be any color, and typically looks fuzzy or stringy).
- 3) Here is a [letter](#) you can give to your landlord, if you’re renting, recommending the landlord clean up the mold. TCHD has no regulatory authority to make the landlord do anything, but TCHD does recommend that mold issues are remediated because the current or future renters may be allergic to mold or have asthma. With the letter, you should give your landlord the following enclosures:

- a. [A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home](#);
 - b. [TCHD Contacts for Mold Remediation Contractors](#)
- 4) If your landlord has been notified but is slow to respond or not responding, linked below is a [list of attorneys](#) that deal with tenant/landlord issues. Some of these attorneys are free or low cost. You should also be aware of [Colorado's Implied Warranty of Habitability Act](#). This law sheds light on who is responsible for maintenance problems in rental units. This law states, in essence, that your landlord promises that your unit is fit for living in when you move in. It also outlines a process for filing complaints. Here is a [fact sheet](#), which provides more details on the act.
- 5) If you want TCHD staff to conduct an inspection for mold or come out and tell you if a material is actually mold, we cannot offer that service due to the low risk for adverse health effects associated with mold. Mold's primary health effects are as an allergen, like peanuts or pet dander. Mold is everywhere. It is in the outdoor environment as well as the vast majority of indoor environments (the exception would be sterile operating rooms). Almost all individuals have built up an immunity to mold. It is a health hazard to individuals allergic to it, to those with asthma who are allergic to mold, and possibly to immune compromised individuals. To the general public, mold is not a health concern.
- 6) If you would like TCHD staff to conduct sampling for mold, be aware that there are two types of sampling for mold that TCHD can offer:: bulk sampling and air sampling. Bulk sampling (collecting a portion of the mold-like material) is useful in some rare cases because it provides the genus of the mold. If your family member is allergic to a particular genus of mold, such as *Penicillium*, this type of sampling will tell you if the mold-like material is what you are allergic to. Bulk sampling will also tell you if the material you are seeing is actually mold, which may be useful in some circumstances. Bulk sampling costs ~\$50/sample. If TCHD collects the sample ourselves, and/or write a report, TCHD would charge for our time, which is currently \$70/hour. On average, this would typically take 2 to 3 hours. Shipping charges would also apply and would be charged to the requestor.

Air sampling for mold is not generally recommended because you can get false negatives. In other words, the mold is present, but it isn't picked up in the air sample. The reason for this is the mold organism produces spores intermittently. When sampling the air for the spores, you never know when they will be produced. The sampling method requires running the sampling pump for a short time period, typically

5 minutes. The spores are in the air for a couple of hours, if at all, so it is possible to miss them if you happen to sample when they're not in the air.

In addition, because of the possibility of the false negatives, the more samples you take, the more likely you are to pick up the mold spores. Hence it is better to sample in both the morning and afternoon. Consequently air sampling quickly becomes expensive. Each sample costs about \$50, and it's advisable to take at least two outdoor samples, in addition to the indoor samples. TCHD also charges for time to conduct mold sampling, which is approximately \$70/hour. Equipment calibration and sampling preparation, on-site sampling time and report generation could take anywhere from 2 to 8 hours, depending on how many times TCHD samples in one day and how many samples are collected. Additionally, there are shipping charges (which vary, but on average cost \$50 to \$100 due to the overnight shipping requirement). Rather than spending your money on sampling, if you can see and/or smell the mold, we recommend you spend your resources on cleaning it up.

Note: TCHD staff can and does conduct air and bulk sampling for mold, but the average renter or homeowner typically doesn't want to pay these costs. If you are interested in sampling, call 720-200-1582, and speak to TCHD's Industrial Hygienist.

- 7) If your landlord hired someone to clean up the mold, but you think they aren't doing it correctly, see [\(IICRC\) S520 Standard and Reference Guide for Professional Mold Remediation, Chapters 3, 7 and 9.](#)
 - a. Chapter 3—Principles of Mold Remediation
 - b. Chapter 7—Structural Remediation
 - c. Chapter 9—Contents Remediation

This document specifies recommended clean up techniques, as set forth by the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification.

- 8) Colorado Housing Connects helps the general public handle mold complaints/issues by advising them on proper record keeping, what agencies other than TCHD to contact for help, and how a lease works in this situation. If you are an elderly or disabled person, there may be government programs and funding, mostly at the county and city level, to assist in mold remediation and repairs. <http://www.coloradohousingconnects.org/>

^a *Damp Indoor Spaces and Health (National Institute of Medicine, 2004)*

^b *If the leak happened a while ago, the mold spores may have been removed from the home. Spores, the dormant form of mold, can still cause health issues in their dormant form. However, the average home undergoes 0.5 air*

changes per hour. In other words, due to normal leaks of air through attics, windows, make-up air for furnaces, crawlspaces, etc., in two hours the air in a home is, in theory, completely exchanged with outdoor air. Due to these air changes, the dormant spores will eventually be removed from the home.