

Mold, a Serious Health Concern for New Yorkers

ALBANY, N.Y. - New Yorkers whose residences sustained water damage as a result of Hurricane Irene may now be confronting another threat to their homes and health -- mold.

Mold can cause serious, long-term health problems. New York State recovery officials and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are urging disaster survivors to protect themselves by treating or discarding mold- and mildew-contaminated items.

Mold and mildew start growing within 24 hours of a flood and can do damage throughout a home, from attics and basements to crawl spaces. The best defense is to discard contaminated items and then to thoroughly clean, disinfect, and dry affected areas.

Porous materials -- anything that absorbs water -- can trap mold forever. Moldy paper, rags, wallboard, and rotten wood should be discarded. Survivors also may need to throw out moldy carpeting, bedding, toys or upholstered furniture.

Protect yourself during cleanup by wearing gloves and a filter mask. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends using N-95 respirators which are available at hardware and home improvement stores. Be sure the area is well ventilated.

Clean wet places immediately. Remember these suggestions:

- Mold cannot grow without moisture. Eliminate the source.
- Discard porous materials with mold growth (i.e. floor coverings, drywall, ceiling tiles).
- Thoroughly clean non-porous materials (glass, ceramic, metal and plastic), with a solution of household bleach, soap or detergent, and water. Use no more than 1½ cups of bleach per gallon of water.
- Wash down walls, floors and other mold-contaminated areas. When using bleach remember:
 - Wear rubber gloves and other protective clothing including goggles and air filtering masks.
 - Make sure the area is well ventilated.
 - **WARNING: Never mix chlorine liquids (bleach) with ammonia.**
- Remove damaged wallboard and insulation at least two feet above the water line.
- Change heating and air conditioning filters. Have ductwork inspected by a professional.
- Monitor the area for new mold growth and signs of moisture.

For large-scale problems, or if you are allergic to mold, have a professional do the work. Disturbing mold while cleaning can cause exposure -- professionals may be better able to locate and remediate mold lurking in hard-to-spot places.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that everyone avoid unnecessary exposure to mold, especially anyone at high risk for infection. Infants, children, pregnant women, individuals with existing respiratory conditions and the elderly are at higher risks for adverse health effects from mold. Typical symptoms reported from mold exposure may include respiratory problems, sinus congestion or a dry, hacking cough, eye irritation, nose, throat and skin irritations, headaches and other pain.

For more information on mold or mold cleanup, visit the state Department of Health website at <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/air/mold.htm> or the CDC's website at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp>.

More tips on what to do after a disaster are available online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov.

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