

Dealing With Mould After a Flood

Introduction:

Natural disasters such as cyclones and floods are usually associated with excess moisture, long periods of heat and humidity and ponding of water. These factors all help to create an environment that is favourable to the growth of moulds.

Public Health Significance:

Exposure to moulds can be through inhalation, skin contact or by ingestion. For some individuals such as asthmatics or those with sensitivities or allergies, exposure to moulds may induce an adverse reaction or cause them to develop health problems. By taking precautions when removing mould and adopting prevention strategies to help reduce mould growth, individuals can help to reduce the risk of mould-related health problems.

Action to Take:

▪ **Recognise mould!**

In some instances mould can be readily seen because of the discolouration it causes to walls, ceilings and other surfaces. However sometimes mould growth may not be readily visible but can be detected by a musty, unpleasant odour.

▪ **Eliminating key mould growth environments**

When returning to a flood affected house or building, you should try to dry it out as quickly as possible by opening all the doors and windows. If possible use fans to speed up the process. Porous items that can't be easily cleaned and have been wet for more than two days should be discarded. This includes items such as mattresses, carpet, food, leather goods and ceiling insulation.

▪ **Cleaning mould**

The most effective way of cleaning mould on walls, floors and other hard surfaces is with a chlorine bleach solution (approximately 1 cup of bleach in 4 litres of water)*. Bleach will also help to eliminate other disease causing organisms that may be present because of contaminated flood waters.

Items that can be washed such as stuffed toys and linen should be washed as usual. The addition of a bleach solution usually helps to remove the mould stain however it may also affect the colour and quality of the fabric. If in doubt, take the items to a professional cleaner or discard them in accordance with your local government's waste disposal methods.

Non-porous items such as glass-ware and some plastics can be washed in hot water with a bleach solution or with a good quality disinfectant and air dried. If using a dishwasher, clean and disinfect it first. Do the wash using a full cycle and hot water.

For further information, please contact your nearest Environmental Health Service office:

Brisbane North -	PH: 3624 1111	Brisbane South -	PH: 3000 9148	Cairns -	PH: 4050 3601
Redcliffe -	PH: 3897 6480	Gold Coast -	PH: 5509 7222	Townsville -	PH: 4753 9000
Sunshine Coast -	PH: 5409 6600	Toowoomba -	PH: 4631 9888	Mt Isa -	PH: 4744 4859
Bundaberg -	PH: 4150 2780	West Moreton -	PH: 3810 1500	Mackay -	PH: 4968 6611
Rockhampton -	PH: 4920 6989	Hervey Bay -	PH: 4120 6000		
Longreach -	PH: 4658 0859	Charleville -	PH: 4656 8100		

Air conditioning and other ventilation units are excellent environments for the growth of moulds and other bacteria. Using the unit without having had it properly cleaned first may result in mould spores becoming airborne and being inhaled or distributed to other parts of the building. It is advisable to have these units serviced by a qualified technician after a flood.

- **Protecting yourself during the clean-up**

Wearing good quality rubber gloves while sorting and cleaning mouldy items will protect the hands and nails from coming into contact with mould. You can protect your eyes by using safety goggles with closed in sides. If your clean-up is extensive or you have sensitivities, try to obtain an N95/P2 disposable respirator. Unlike conventional dust masks that only provide protection against large particulates, these masks protect against microscopic spores and bacteria. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions and fit the mask properly. Wear protective clothing that can be disposed of or easily washed.

- **Prevention**

Moisture control is the single most effective method for controlling mould growth. In high rainfall areas this is difficult to achieve, however other contributing factors such as leaky plumbing, roofs and other fixtures should be repaired as soon as possible. If repainting walls or other hard surfaces that are prone to mould growth, anti-mould solutions can be added into paint to help retard mould growth. Ask your painter or hardware supplier for details. Outdoors, factors such as vegetation growing on or close to walls help to hold in moisture and promote mould growth. Try to clear vegetation and soil away from walls and breathe holes.

** Bleach and ammonia should not be mixed together as they can produce toxic fumes.*

Acknowledgement:

Information for this document was sourced from the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website* - <http://www.cdc.gov/mold/>

For further information, please contact your nearest Environmental Health Service office:

Brisbane North -	PH: 3624 1111	Brisbane South -	PH: 3000 9148	Cairns -	PH: 4050 3601
Redcliffe -	PH: 3897 6480	Gold Coast -	PH: 5509 7222	Townsville -	PH: 4753 9000
Sunshine Coast -	PH: 5409 6600	Toowoomba -	PH: 4631 9888	Mt Isa -	PH: 4744 4859
Bundaberg -	PH: 4150 2780	West Moreton -	PH: 3810 1500	Mackay -	PH: 4968 6611
Rockhampton -	PH: 4920 6989	Hervey Bay -	PH: 4120 6000		
Longreach -	PH: 4658 0859	Charleville -	PH: 4656 8100		

(Last amended June 2007)