

## **General Mold Information Frequently Asked Questions**

The health and safety of our residents and campus staff is our top priority. The Departments of Resident Life, Residential Facilities, and specialized contractors are working around the clock to address concerns around mold growth in some locations on campus.

The below FAQ addresses common questions around what causes mold growth, cleaning and remediation efforts, and health and safety.

### **ABOUT MOLD**

#### **What causes mold to grow?**

Mold spores are always present in both the indoor and outdoor environment. Mold grows best in warm, damp, humid conditions and reproduces by spores. Spores can remain viable under harsh environmental conditions, including dry conditions, which normally do not support mold growth. The growth of mold in an indoor environment requires three basic elements: food, water, and climate. Buildings provide food sources (primarily wood and paper) for mold to grow. The key to controlling mold growth on materials in the indoor environment is moisture control. This includes maintaining moderate relative humidity levels indoors, and responding promptly to water intrusion.

#### **Are there any state or national regulations regarding mold?**

There are no federal or state regulations directly governing the presence of mold or mold spores in buildings. There are also no health standards from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or public health departments for concentrations of mold spores in the indoor air. Professionals agree that the presence of visible mold on indoor building materials is an unacceptable condition, and should be remediated.

#### **How does mold spread?**

Air circulation in a building varies throughout the day and depends on the level of activity in that space. Mold spores are always present in both the indoor and outdoor environment. The key to controlling mold growth on surfaces is moisture control.

#### **What steps can I take to help prevent mold growth?**

The key to mold control is moisture control. Here are some simple tips you can follow to help prevent mold growth:

- Keep windows closed, particularly during periods of high humidity and rain. Uncontrolled moisture and environmental particulates can enter buildings through open windows.
- If you observe flooding or water intrusion in your building, or if your air is stagnant and/or humid, report these conditions as soon as possible for response from building personnel.

- Keep furniture and storage containers at least 12 inches from the fan coil unit (air conditioner/heater). When furniture is placed directly in front of the fan coil unit, it blocks the air flow into and out of the unit.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **How does mold affect people?**

Exposure to mold can cause allergy-like symptoms (nasal stuffiness, eye irritation) and/or skin irritation in some people. Depending on a person's sensitivity, these reactions could be more or less severe. The presence of mold may also exacerbate asthma. It is the time of year when there is an increase in cold and flu symptoms. It is often hard to distinguish these symptoms from those caused by mold, which can include nose and throat irritation, congestion and cough. More severe symptoms of mold exposure may include wheezing or shortness of breath. Though there is no test for mold exposure, if you are concerned or are feeling unwell, you should consider consulting your doctor or the University Health Center.

### **Should air samples be obtained for mold in my residence hall?**

Mold is present in the indoor and outdoor air and on surfaces all around us each day. It requires moisture and a food source to colonize materials. The University does not conduct air sampling for mold and instead follows federal agency guidance:

From the CDC:

"Standards for judging what is an acceptable, tolerable, or normal quantity of mold have not been established" and "Generally it is not necessary to identify the species of mold growth in a residence, and CDC does not recommend routine sampling for molds. Current evidence indicates that allergies are the type of diseases most often associated with molds. Since the susceptibility of individuals vary greatly either because of the amount or type of mold, sampling and culturing are not reliable in determining your health risk... therefore, no matter what time of mold is present, you should arrange for its removal."

From the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

"In most cases, if visible mold growth is present, sampling is unnecessary. Since no EPA or other federal limits have been set for mold or mold spores, sampling cannot be used to check a building's compliance with federal mold standards."

### **What types of mold have been found?**

Mold growing on various materials is visible. Sampling to determine the types of mold is not recommended by the EPA or the CDC. Mold should be cleaned and removed by qualified personnel regardless of the type of mold present.

### **Should I purchase a portable air cleaner and dehumidifier?**

Residential Facilities has installed professional grade dehumidifiers in the impacted buildings. Because of this, a personal dehumidifier is not considered required but there are no restrictions if individuals choose to bring their own. Please note that many personal dehumidifiers require the reservoir to be emptied. This not a service that is provided by Residential Facilities. If you would like to purchase a portable air cleaner for your residence, please refer to this EPA Publication: [Guide to Air Cleaners in the Home](#)

### **Is it safe for me to stay in my residence hall that currently has mold?**

According to federal health and safety agencies, mold growth is commonly found in both indoor and outdoor environments. Some people are sensitive to mold and may experience short-term reactions in the presence of mold growth. Symptoms associated with mold exposure are not unique and cannot be readily distinguished from symptoms caused by other medical conditions, such as the common cold or seasonal environmental allergies. Since some individuals may have more intense reactions, those with medical conditions or who experience symptoms should consult with medical personnel regarding their risk to mold exposure.

### **Is it safe to be inside my room while cleaning or remediation work is going on?**

Residential Facilities personnel will ask residents to vacate their room to spot clean using a hospital grade disinfectant. Once cleaning is complete, the resident is invited back to their space.

### **I am feeling ill from possible mold exposure and would like to be moved from my room.**

#### **How do I request a relocation?**

In order to facilitate a move to another space on campus, we ask that you visit the Health Center or your doctor to assess your situation and the likelihood that what you are experiencing may be related to mold. If that is the case, the Health Center will coordinate with the Department of Resident Life to determine possible options for temporary relocation to another on-campus residence hall location until the situation has been remediated.

## **INSPECTION, CLEANING & REMEDIATION PROCESS**

### **Who is in charge of the inspection and remediation process in the residence halls?**

The Department of Residential Facilities is partnering with a third party consulting firm, [Building Dynamics](#), to review Residential Facilities' standard operating procedures in response to mold. In addition, they will be evaluating building systems to help to determine the root cause of these issues.

### **What is the inspection process to determine how to address any mold in my residence hall?**

A qualified staff member from the Department of Residential Facilities will knock, enter, and conduct a visual inspection of furniture, wall, closets, and fan coil units to check for any evidence of mold growth or other concerns. If mold growth is found, staff will take appropriate

steps to clean or remediate items. If there is significant mold growth on any furniture in a room, Residential Facilities staff will swap that piece of furniture out for an unaffected item.

**How are you treating the mold located in other places besides Elkton Hall?**

If mold growth is found in other residence halls, staff will take appropriate steps to clean or remediate items. If there is significant mold growth on any furniture in a room, Residential Facilities staff will swap that piece of furniture out for an unaffected item.

**Why are you confident that the cleaning and remediation approach will be effective?**

By following federal guidelines and additional recommendations from industrial hygiene professionals on cleaning and building system operations, the university expects the spaces to be within recommended parameters for occupancy. In addition, an audit of each space is being completed to ensure that each step of the process was followed by contractors. Residential Facilities staff expect that after this cleaning and mechanical improvement process is completed, the humidity will be stabilized to a more comfortable and typical indoor level.

**The remediation specialists are using personal protective equipment. Why aren't students being told to do so?**

The risk of exposure to mold spores goes up when the material is disturbed. Our staff has been assigned to handle furniture and in some instances clean mold and mildew from surfaces. Individuals have varying susceptibilities to mold, so the masks are available for use when directly handling moldy materials for an extended period of time. The remediation contractors who will be conducting most of the cleaning inside their sealed-off area will use additional protective equipment as they have the greatest exposure potential.

**I've heard that Elkton Hall residents are being relocated to hotels for a full-building remediation. What is being done for the other residence halls?**

Mold has been reported throughout Elkton Hall, compared to more isolated incidents in other areas. Residential Facilities staff are responding as quickly as possible to all reports of possible mold in residence halls. If students suspect that there may be mold in their residence hall room, the student should contact Residential Facilities as soon as possible by calling the 24-Hour Service Center at 301-314-9675. We are currently experiencing a high volume of inquiries. We are responding as quickly as possible and will prioritize emergencies and medical needs. Residential Facilities staff will knock, enter, and conduct an inspection of furniture, wall, closets, and fan coil units to check for any evidence of mold growth or other concerns. If mold growth is found, staff will take appropriate steps to clean or remediate items. If there is significant mold growth on any furniture in a room, Residential Facilities staff will swap that piece of furniture out for an unaffected item.

**OTHER INFORMATION**

**What if I need additional time to complete class assignments because of this disruption, or become ill from the mold exposure and can't attend my classes?**

The university recognizes that packing belongings, cleaning, and moving in the midst of the semester are unanticipated, time-consuming activities. Therefore, all faculty have been notified of this disruption and were asked to give every consideration for academic accommodation to affected students during this period. Faculty have also been alerted that students experiencing adverse health effects should be referred to the University Health Center or other facilities for medical care. You can find a copy of the message to faculty [here](#).

**What should I do if I have experienced any personal property damage or loss?**

The University is a self-insured organization through the State of Maryland. If you wish to file a claim for property damage, claims can be directed to the State Treasurer's office using the links and information below:

<https://www.essr.umd.edu/risk/insurance/instructions-completing-notice-claim>

<http://www.treasurer.state.md.us/insurance.aspx>

There are several ways to contact the State Treasurer's office:

[Maryland State Treasurer's Office Insurance Division](#)

80 Calvert Street, Room 109

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-260-7684

Fax to 410-974-2865

Via email at [accidentreports@treasurer.state.md.us](mailto:accidentreports@treasurer.state.md.us)

The State will assign an adjuster who will be in contact regarding the necessary steps to investigate and process the claim.

We also encourage students to check for coverage under their parents' homeowners insurance and/or renters' insurance to determine possible coverage for loss through these policies.