

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 and Residential Facilities strive to prevent excess moisture and mold growth in campus residences. Annually, projects are completed to this end.

This document addresses three areas:

- What causes mold growth
- Health and Safety
- Inspection and remediation efforts.

ABOUT MOLD

What causes mold to grow?

Mold spores are always present in both indoor and outdoor environments. 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. The CDC indicates that visible mold on indoor building materials should be removed, and the moisture source that helped it grow should be removed. Mold can be removed from hard surfaces with household cleaning products.

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 indoor and outdoor environments and will enter buildings through windows and doors and on clothing & shoes. 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 to help prevent mold growth:

- Keep windows closed when air conditioning is on - specifically when the outside humidity is higher than 65%. This may cause condensation that can cause mold growth. You can open windows for fresh air when the A/C is off.
- Place furniture or other items 12" away from fan coil units to avoid obstructing airflow.
- If your room has a dehumidifier, keep it on when the AC is on.
- Set thermostats no lower than 72 degrees when cooling; fans should be set on low speed or "auto."
- Hang wet or damp clothes, towels, or shoes on a drying rack or hook until dry.
- Frequently dust and vacuum. Mold spores will always be floating through the air and in settled dust; however, they will only grow if they find moisture.
- Empty your room and bathroom trash regularly .
- In suites and apartments, make sure the bathroom exhaust fan is on or is operating if it comes on automatically. Clean your shower regularly to prevent mold and mildew.
- Immediately report flooding or water intrusion in your room or if your air is stagnant and/or humid.
- Place potted plants or any other source of moisture away from fan coil units, not on them.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

How does mold affect people?

According to the CDC, mold may cause a variety of health effects or none at all. Mold exposure 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; most people will have no reaction. The presence of mold may also exacerbate asthma. During times of the 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 feel unwell, you should consult your doctor or the University Health Center.

Should air samples be taken 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."

How effective are mold kits that can be bought online or in stores?

DIY mold kits are agar plates that provide a perfect growth medium (food and moisture) for any microbes floating in the air. They will almost always grow something. This could be mold spores, yeasts, or bacteria that are present in the air. This does not mean there is a problem. When we inspect for mold, we are looking for visible mold growing on surfaces, not the spores that will always be present in the air. If conditions conducive to mold growth (high humidity or uncontrolled moisture and food) are not present in your residence, mold does not colonize there. If you put a mold test plate out, you have provided the very things that mold spores are looking for: food and moisture.

Should I purchase a portable air cleaner and dehumidifier?

Residential Facilities have installed dehumidifiers in many of our residence halls/chapter houses that lack central dehumidification. Because of this, a personal dehumidifier is not necessary, 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 is 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](#).

I am feeling ill and believe it could be from possible mold exposure. How do I request an inspection? And, if I would like to move rooms, how do I request a reassignment?

Request a mold inspection by calling the 24/7 Residential Facilities Service Center at 301-314-9675 (x4WORK) or by contacting the Department of Environmental Safety, Sustainability & Risk ([ESSR](#)) To facilitate a move to another space on campus due to a mold allergy, we ask that you visit the Accessibility and Disability Services (ADS) Office. They will work with you and your doctor to assess your situation and the likelihood that what you are experiencing may be related to mold. If that is the case, ADS 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/Greek on-campus chapter houses?

The Department of Residential Facilities has a program to address moisture and mold in campus residences. They have trained staff who will conduct an inspection and necessary cleaning to address problems found. Professional remediation services handle mold growth beyond the capabilities of DRF.

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 360° inspection of furniture, walls, closets, and fan coil units to check for any evidence of mold growth or other concerns. They will measure the temperature and humidity in your residence to determine if conditions conducive to mold growth are present. If mold growth is found, staff will take appropriate steps to correct excess moisture and clean or remediate visible mold.

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