

MOLD EXPOSURE AND CLEANING INFORMATION

Any item (furniture, clothes, drywall, photographs, etc.) that has come in contact with water in a flooded home must be discarded. Water wicks up above the flood level; therefore, drywall, processed wood products, and other porous material should be cut at least 12 to 18 inches above the visible flood level line and discarded.

What about items that are above the water line and have not been touched by the water? If you're in doubt about such items, the best policy is to toss them out. One of the problems with mold is that mold forms spores that can be spread in the air (for example, if you have a few moldy slices of bread in a bread bag, the good slices of bread eventually will also become moldy). If the home was flooded, there's a good chance that mold spores will be on most things in that section of the home, even items that were not damaged by the water, because of the ability of mold spores to float in the air especially in a closed, humid environment like a flooded home.

If you truly feel that there are items that were not touched by the water or in the immediate vicinity of the water, you can try to salvage some of these items. If it's clothes that have not come in contact with the flood water, the clothes can be soaked in a large tub with laundry detergent mixed with 10% bleach (roughly one part bleach to 9 or 10 parts water) for a couple of hours, making sure to periodically agitate the clothes so that the detergent/bleach solution soaks through the clothing fibers. Rinse the clothes with clean water a couple of times (to remove any dead spores) and flush the water down a drain. Wring the clothes with your hands, and put the clothes in a washing machine for a thorough wash with detergent (and 10% bleach, if you want to be extra sure that you have killed mold spores). After you have washed all of your mold-affected clothes, run the washer a couple of times with nothing in it except bleach (the amount of bleach you normally would add to the wash) - this procedure will help clean out the washing machine. Make sure you don't simply toss mold-filled clothes directly into a washing machine (before the soaking procedure described in this paragraph) because you may end up contaminating the washing machine with mold spores which could then contaminate subsequent loads of clothes.

If the items are photographs, picture frames, furniture, office supplies, etc., I would try to carefully wipe off any possible mold spores from the surfaces with a detergent (e.g., dish detergent)/10% bleach solution. Use a slow wiping motion to avoid dispersing spores and use disposable cloths or paper towels that can be placed in garbage bags that are then securely tied. This procedure assumes that the items have not been in water contact (for example, if water has contacted wood furniture for even a short period of time, the mold is inside the wood and cannot be removed - that's why drywall that has been water damaged is cut and tossed out). After cleaning these items, keep an eye on them and check them every few days for a couple of weeks to see if any mold (usually seen as black, white offcolor, cream color, or other color film similar to what you see on moldy cheese or bread) appears on these items - if so, you should discard them in a closed bag. The following link may be helpful in determining what to do about items like photographs that have been in contact with water:

<http://www.bestphoto restoration.com/about4.html>.

Make sure that you wear waterproof gloves (e.g., disposable medical gloves or dishwashing gloves), a face mask (preferably an N95 face mask which filters at least 95% of airborne particles and can be purchased from Home Depot, Lowes, and some pharmacies, and not a dust mask), and goggles while cleaning these affected items, and then throw away these gloves and face masks (the goggles can probably be disinfected with 10% bleach) after you complete

the cleaning. Wear clothes, shoes, etc. that can be washed in 10% bleach after you complete the cleaning, and try to shower immediately afterwards (to remove any mold spores in your hair or on your skin). Try to do the cleaning in a closed area of the home (e.g., the laundry room), and cover the a/c vent in the room during the cleaning process. If you have a dehumidifier, use and run it in the room (mold thrives in humid environments, but grows poorly in drier environments). You might want to spray Lysol or a disinfectant in this room after you are through cleaning everything. If possible, try to do all of this before you get in your car and drive elsewhere (you don't want to risk the possibility of mold spores getting in your car, even though this is a very low possibility). You may want to consider purchasing a disposable rain poncho (you can buy these for \$1 at Dollar Tree) and disposable shoe covers (these can be purchased at Lowes or Home Depot - they're used by home contractors to avoid tracking dirt into a new home) or even a plastic bag to cover your shoes - if you wear these types of coverings, you don't have to worry as much about mold spores getting on your clothes and shoes. A disposable shower cap can be used to cover your hair. Consider the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) worn by technicians going into a home to remove mold-contaminated materials - face masks, goggles, protective garments, shoe covers, etc.

One should also be very careful to have certified or reputable mold remediation experts test/check to be sure mold spores have not circulated throughout the house (e.g., second floor of a home in which only the first floor has been flooded) via the ventilation (a/c) system. If the a/c was left on during the flooding of the house, most likely mold spores have spread to other areas of the home (that's what happens in sick building syndrome).

All of these suggestions are based on my knowledge of mold spores and how they spread. One should not be alarmed, but should take appropriate precautions when entering a flooded home and handling items that may have come in contact with mold or other types of microorganisms. Mold is not as readily transmitted as influenza, pneumonia, or other highly contagious pathogens, but can still be a problem if not handled correctly. The procedures described may be extreme and "overkill", and may not be necessary, but it's better to be safe than sorry. Be especially careful if you're very old, very young, have respiratory problems, or are immunocompromised - these people are more susceptible to mold spores than other people.

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