

How To Find Mold In Your Home

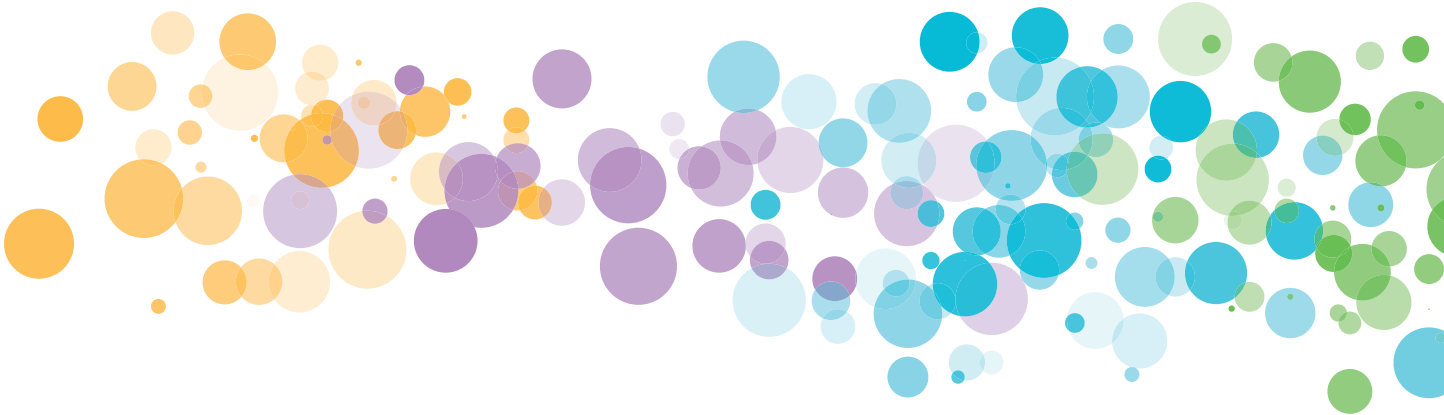
Professional Tips & Techniques

got mold?[®]

Real Science. Real Simple.[™]

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SECTION 1:

Introduction: Like a Pro

The prospect of inspecting your own home for mold can be daunting. Where to even begin? It's why many of us ultimately resort to calling a professional, which can be costly, or doing nothing at all, which can be unhealthy. But with some basic information and an understanding of the clues most professionals use, you can inspect your home "like a pro."

The purpose of this guide is also to help you know what you can do yourself, and when to hire a pro.

There are three kinds of mold:

1. Mold you can see
2. Mold you can smell but can't see
3. Mold you can't see or smell (Hidden mold)

The first type of mold, that which you can see, is, of course, the easiest to detect, and most homeowners will take immediate steps for its removal. But it's vital to understand that visible mold is often just the tip of the iceberg, with a deeper look revealing bigger issues.

The second type, mold you can smell but can't see, is an underappreciated health hazard and may require a professional inspection to identify the moisture source and determine the extent of the problem. These issues are usually within a wall cavity, or in areas that are out of sight and out of mind, like crawlspaces, or even more subtle locations, such as in or under your carpet.

And then there's mold you can neither see nor smell, which is the trickiest kind since a musty smell is usually the first clue of an issue.

Hidden mold is particularly insidious because it's rarely detected early on, allowing it to fester and thrive. This often happens deep within wall cavities, especially behind poorly installed brick and stucco, so there's no direct pathway for the odor to make it into the building.

Left unchecked, the underlying moisture causing the mold problem can also lead to rot and structural damage, making it not just harmful to your health, but also to the health of your building. These scenarios always require professionals to assess, repair and remediate.

The first step in proper mold assessment is a careful accounting of your home for past and present moisture problems. Indoor mold growth, after all, is a result of excess moisture.

If signs of excess moisture are discovered, the next step is to determine whether or not air quality has been compromised. Again, even if you can't see or smell any issues, hidden mold remains a distinct possibility, and one of the most effective ways to assess the situation is through air sampling.

In this regard, the GOT MOLD? Test Kit, which employs the same spore traps used by professional inspectors, is an affordable, easy, and scientifically-backed method for sampling a room's air.

By reading this booklet and following our guidelines for inspecting the inside and outside of your home, you will gain a valuable understanding of how moisture problems develop and where mold may be present. This, in turn, will allow you to effectively and efficiently utilize the power of the GOT MOLD? Test Kit and help get you on the road to a healthier and happier lifestyle.



SECTION 2:

Mold 101

what's the problem?

Let's start with a brief discussion about mold. Mold 101. Here's what you need to know.

Mold spores are essentially microscopic seeds that are constantly floating through the air. They are literally everywhere: on your clothing, eyeglasses, watch, your kitchen table, etc. In fact, at this very moment you are inhaling mold spores, and probably not being bothered in the slightest. They are unavoidable and, generally speaking, not harmful. What is harmful and what we really need to avoid is indoor mold growth—areas where mold spores have settled and festered, creating dense concentrations that can create any number of issues.

Here are some reasons you do not want mold growth in your house:

- It can make you and your family sick
- It ruins your stuff
- It stinks
- Other nasty critters like to join the party (e.g., spiders, dust mites, bacteria, rodents, etc.)
- You may end up having a hard time selling your house
- Left unchecked, moisture problems can lead to rot and structural issues.

And since indoor mold growth is a symptom of excess moisture, the objectives of any mold inspection, whether it's done by you or a professional, should include:

- locating any areas of current mold growth, and determined the source(s) of moisture.
- preventing mold growth by eliminating potential sources of moisture
- ensuring that other moisture-related problems, such as rot, structural damage, dust mites, spiders, insects, rodents and numerous other unwanted guests, don't appear.
- determining the extent of your problem so that appropriate remediation planning can begin.

the health connection

If you or someone in your household has frequent asthmatic episodes, chronic sinus infections, allergies or any unexplained, persistent ailment, there could be a mold problem. The presence of a musty odor (aka “basement smell”), is also a strong indication of mold growth, and can often induce headaches, nasal irritation, nausea, dizziness and fatigue. Numerous studies have confirmed links between indoor mold growth and a variety of common illnesses. And there are thousands of documented cases in which mold removal alone resulted in significant health improvements.

Molds are living organisms, microscopic in size and they grow similar to plants, feeding on decaying or dead organic material. They are nature’s great recycler, turning dead plant matter back into dirt. When they’re eating leaves and twigs in your yard, that’s nature’s work. But in your basement or living room, it’s a different story.

Molds produce billions of spores—their version of seeds—which are carried on air currents, enabling them to grow in other locations and reproduce. Spores give each type of mold its distinct color and appearance. About 1 billion spores can fit into one square inch!

Molds also produce Microbial Volatile Organic Compounds (MVOCs) such as benzene, methyl chloride, alcohol and acetone—chemicals commonly associated with the oil and chemical industries. Some molds also produce toxic compounds known as mycotoxins, which, though highly useful at times (Penicillin is a mycotoxin that kills bacteria), can have negative impacts on our health, dependent on type and exposure.

The NJ Department of Health, in a 2004 bulletin, stated: “Different molds may produce different mycotoxins (mold toxins) and some molds may produce different mycotoxins depending on the surface on which they’re growing. Mycotoxins can affect the central nervous system, the immune system, the respiratory system and the digestive system. Some molds may cause more severe reactions than other molds, so it’s important that mold be remediated.”

When elevated mold growth levels are present in a home, allergies and upper respiratory issues are common, as is irritation to the upper airway, sinuses and mucous membranes. Symptoms usually disappear when the mold growth and the moisture conditions causing it are removed. But some people experience persistent health problems which may require medical treatment. Responses vary according to age, gender, state of health, genetic make-up and the duration of exposure. Some have no symptoms at all or experience low-level symptoms like a stuffy nose and irritated eyes.

FACT:

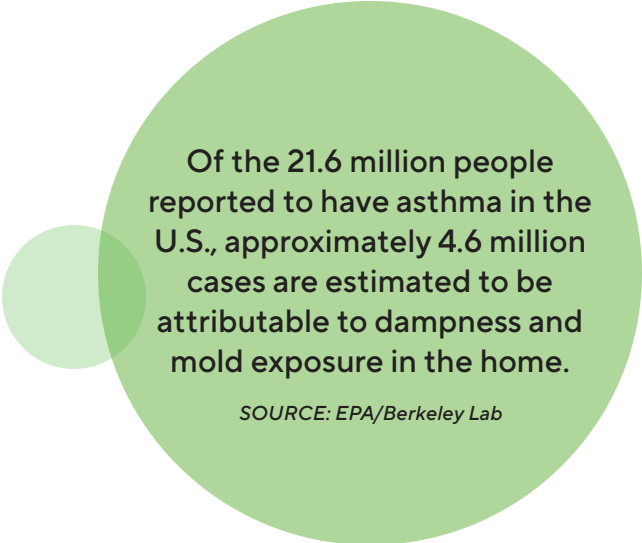
“Organic” doesn’t just describe something you can find at the health food store. Chemically speaking, and for the purpose of this e-book, “organic material” refers to something that is made up of stuff that was at one time living. (Think: paper, fabric, wood, dust, paints, and much much more.)

SPORES GALORE!

Molds and other fungi produce 50 megatons of spores annually; the equivalent of 500,000 blue whales. Fungi is the single largest producer of biological particles on the planet.

Common symptoms associated with short-term exposure:

- Allergies
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Wheezing
- Asthma attacks
- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Sinusitis
- Itchy eyes
- Hives
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating

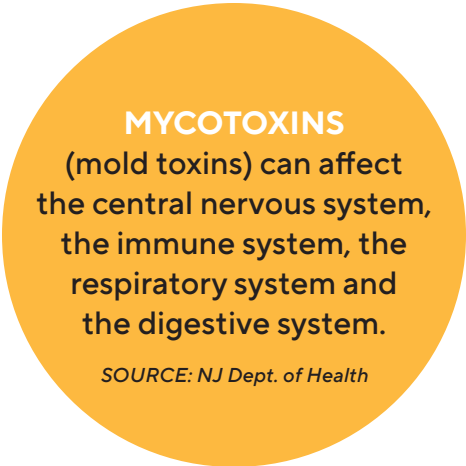


Of the 21.6 million people reported to have asthma in the U.S., approximately 4.6 million cases are estimated to be attributable to dampness and mold exposure in the home.

SOURCE: EPA/Berkeley Lab

Symptoms associated with chronic exposure include:

- Frequent respiratory infections
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Confusion
- Severe fatigue
- Weight gain
- Night terrors
- Anger “aka mold rage”
- Memory loss
- Brain fog
- Hair loss
- Tinnitus
- Chemical sensitivities

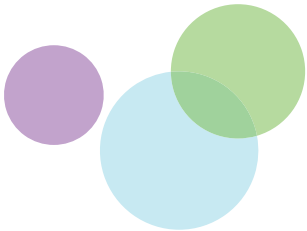


MYCOTOXINS
(mold toxins) can affect the central nervous system, the immune system, the respiratory system and the digestive system.

SOURCE: NJ Dept. of Health

Diagnoses closely related to chronic mold exposure:

- CIRS
- MTHFR gene mutation
- Chronic sinusitis
- Lyme
- Fibromyalgia
- ME/CFS
- Sarcoidosis



Meanwhile, medical research is making headway in the struggle to connect mold to human illnesses. According to the Mayo Clinic, mold is the primary underlying cause of nearly all chronic sinusitis—persistent inflammation of nasal cavities—and is one of the most prevalent long-term illnesses in America, affecting almost 37 million Americans. And of the 21.6 million people reported to have asthma in the U.S., more than 20 percent are estimated to be attributable to dampness and mold exposure in the home, according to EPA/Berkeley Lab. Even depression can be linked to damp, moldy homes, according to a 2007 Brown University study. For more on these and other studies, [click here](#).

why now?

Why is mold a bigger problem today than ever before? Because about 40 years ago, new construction methods and materials were developed to comply with Title 24 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations of 1978, focusing on energy conservation. The result of these innovations have been buildings that do not ventilate, or breathe, as freely as before, allowing moisture to become more easily trapped and creating an environment favorable for harmful mold growth. Compounding the issue, modern materials such as drywall and paper-backed insulation are extremely mold-friendly once they get wet.

Legal issues related to mold are now in the news more than ever. Property owners are increasingly being held responsible for not proactively informing tenants and buyers about potential mold issues or for not taking action to remediate existing problems. Since mold can grow from minor water problems, as seemingly innocuous as wet inside plant baskets or damp laundry hung indoors, or from larger problems such as plumbing failures and roof leaks, it's imperative property owners stay ahead of the mold curve.

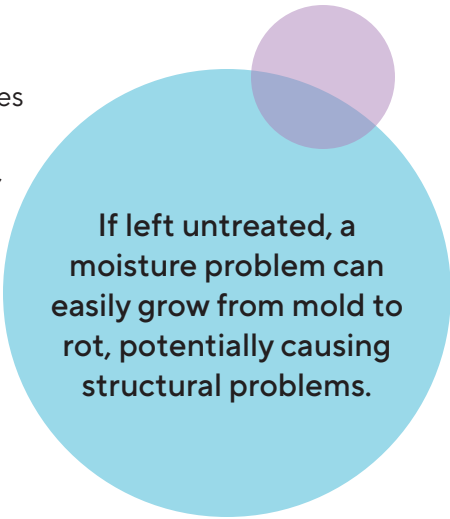
There's also legislation pending in many states and at the federal level that would make mold inspections a mandatory part of real estate transfers. If enacted, these laws would make identifying troublesome mold a significant part of buying or selling a home or commercial asset.

toxic mold

There has been rampant media hype about *Stachybotrys Chartarum*, better known as "black mold" or "toxic mold," and many in the mold detection or remediation business have gleefully contributed to the hysteria. While there is no medical proof that this mold is more harmful than every other mold, anecdotal evidence does suggest that it is dangerous.

The danger is at least partly due to the fact that *Stachybotrys* takes a long time to form, signifying a chronic moisture problem. Also, proving the presence of *Stachybotrys* with air sampling is chancy, at best, because its spores are relatively heavy. Not only does this make it more difficult for them to become airborne, but they remain in the air for less time than lighter spores.

So you're not looking for "toxic mold," or "black mold." You're looking for evidence of indoor mold growth, which generally indicates higher levels of mold spores indoors than outdoors. Most importantly, you're looking for the underlying moisture problem, since mold is a symptom, not the cause.



If left untreated, a moisture problem can easily grow from mold to rot, potentially causing structural problems.

mold's ideal environment—your home

Mold is nature's recycler. In the great outdoors, molds, mushrooms and other fungi are responsible for the decay of organic material, such as wood, leaves, flowers, or animal tissue. When mold is found inside homes, it does exactly the same—it starts to devour the material on which it is living. If left untreated, mold will slowly eat away the organic and construction materials in your home, potentially causing structural problems.

Most environmental professionals agree that indoor mold spore concentrations, on average, should be lower than concentrations outdoors, provided we have healthy living conditions. In a "clean" home, mold concentrations usually range from 10 to 5,000 spores per square inch on horizontal surfaces, to 200 to 5,000 spores per cubic meter in the air. When severe mold contamination is present, however, indoor mold spore concentrations often exceed 100,000 spores per cubic meter of air.

Mold needs the same things to grow that humans do:

Food

Mold needs an organic source of food, such as wood, fabric, leather, fiberboard, drywall, insulation material, ceiling tiles, paint textiles, dirt, dust and paper adhesives.

Mold will sometimes appear to grow on non-organic surfaces, like glass, tile or stone. Mold found on these materials live off organic debris such as dust, oil films, dirt, skin cells, etc., deposited on the surface.

Comfortable Temperature

Most molds are happiest where we are generally happiest: in a warm, cozy place (60 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit). Though some common molds, such as *Cladosporium*, tolerate much lower temperatures.

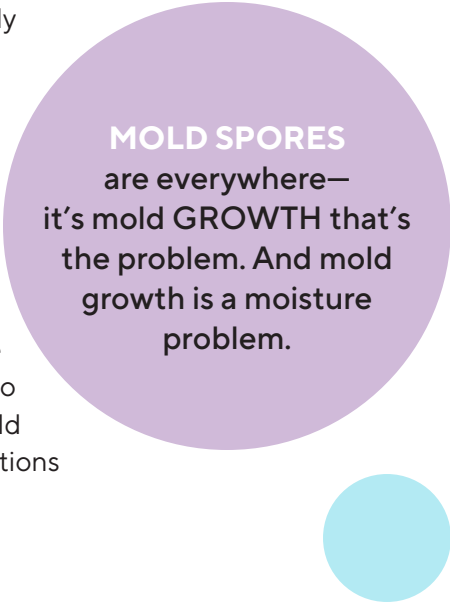
Oxygen

Just like us, mold needs to breathe.

Water

Mold requires a certain amount of surface moisture and, depending on the type of mold, a sustained relative humidity of 50% to 80%.

In short, since we build buildings out of mold food, have plenty of oxygen in our homes, and maintain a comfortable climate indoors, to prevent mold growth the only variable we can control is moisture, so it's imperative that we do.



MOLD SPORES
are everywhere—
it's mold **GROWTH** that's
the problem. And mold
growth is a moisture
problem.

it's everywhere!


Mold is, in a word, everywhere—and it's not all bad! We come in contact with mold every single day of our lives and many of the things that we love and willfully ingest are actually made of mold—wine, beer, cheese, even soy sauce. Most of our contact with mold takes place unnoticed. In even the healthiest environs, we routinely inhale naturally occurring molds while outdoors, or mold found indoors as a result of outdoor infiltration.

Often, indoor exposure to mold is the result of our own living habits or common household items such as moldy food, potted plants, or damp clothing and towels. Only if mold is found in highly visible or accessible areas are we likely to notice.

According to the EPA, mold growth can occur indoors whenever excess moisture accumulates and is not fully dried within 24-48 hours.

Extensive mold growth is likely to occur following a major water leak, triggered by a burst pipe, sewer backflow, tub overflow, or in the aftermath of a fire. However, minor water events can also cause significant mold growth if not quickly and properly addressed.

There are many different indoor and outdoor sources and causes for minor indoor water leaks.



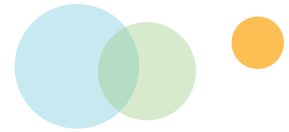
Even minor water events can cause significant mold growth if not quickly and properly addressed.

exterior water sources

- Leaking faucets or sprinkler valves
- Water pooling next to the home
- Roof or chimney leaks
- Water, vegetation or debris accumulating on roof
- Vegetation next to or growing on the home
- Sprinkler heads too close to the side of the house
- Absence of rain gutters, or downspouts not draining away from the house
- Accumulation of dirt and debris on window ledges
- Window and door leaks
- Damaged or leaky siding; improper drainage of siding
- Damp garage
- Damp or poorly ventilated crawl space
- Sewer backed up
- Soil sloping toward house

interior water sources

- Leaking faucets, water valves, or inadequately sealed toilet
- Insufficient caulking around tub and shower
- Storage of garbage under the sink
- Steam from cooking and dishwasher
- Leaking water valves or lines under sink or water conditioning units
- Leaking air conditioning condensate lines
- Inadequate bathroom ventilation
- Bathroom exhaust fan venting into attic space
- Carpeted bathrooms
- Potted plants, especially when in wicker baskets
- Accumulation of dirt and dust on window ledges and panes
- Wet clothes drying indoors
- Clothes dryer vented indoors
- Dirty heating and air-conditioning (HVAC) ducts
- Spilled liquids on carpeted surfaces
- Poor carpet cleaning job (excess moisture left behind)
- Condensation in attic
- Dampness in closets, especially on the ground floor next to exterior walls, or adjacent to bathrooms
- High humidity levels in any room or excessive use of humidifiers



The time varies for each different type of mold to establish itself, but **some types can start growing within 24 hours of a water event**. In most cases the growth may not become visible for several days, or it may not become visible at all if it grows in a concealed location. This is why careful examination and scientific testing can be enlightening.

Inattention to routine cleaning and maintenance of heating, air conditioning and water utilities in and around your home can contribute to elevated moisture and mold growth. The following are the most common causes of “household” mold growth caused by inadequate cleaning or maintenance:

- Dirty HVAC system
- Dryer vented indoors
- Wet clothes drying indoors
- Garbage stored under the kitchen sink
- Inadequate bathroom ventilation, or bathroom exhaust vented into attic
- Moisture from dishwasher
- Unvented steam from cooking, baths, and showers
- Excessive indoor plants
- Loose or missing caulking around bathtubs and shower
- Moisture from incomplete carpet cleaning
- Chronic plumbing leaks
- The use of carpeting in bathrooms
- Infrequent cleaning of carpeting and window sills
- Any excessive humidity

flood!

If you have any kind of flood or water event in your home, ACT IMMEDIATELY! The quicker cleanup and drying takes place, the less water damage and mold development there will be to repair. Discard wet cardboard boxes and make sure all of the following are dried immediately:

- Wet clothing
- Wet carpet padding and carpeting
- Baseboards and drywall
- The underside and back of cabinets

If the flooding is extensive, immediately call a professional restoration company.

[Here's a useful link to the US EPA's guide to flood cleanup in your home.](#)

REMEMBER: Mold growth can start within 24 hours of a water event. So act quickly!

clean it up yourself?

Before any cleanup is done, the source of moisture must be diagnosed and corrected, otherwise the mold will quickly return.

Although small and localized areas of mold growth can often be removed by the homeowner, it is important that all affected materials be removed and the source of the moisture fixed. This usually requires hiring a qualified restoration or remediation professional.

While the EPA claims it's okay for a homeowner to self-remediate an area of mold three feet by three feet (nine square feet) or less, there are hidden risks involved. If you have nine square feet of visible mold on a wall, for example, it could be the proverbial tip of the iceberg; there could be massive mold growth in the wall cavity which, once disturbed, will contaminate an entire house.

Therefore, **we don't recommend** anyone do their own mold remediation, unless it consists of nothing more than scrubbing tile or other nonporous surfaces. If you do hire a contractor, make sure they adhere to the IICRC S520 Mold Remediation Standard, and provide you with proof of insurance, numerous references, and are willing to submit to third-party testing by a qualified environmental consulting firm with expertise in mold remediation.

If you choose not to hire an environmental consultant, make sure the affected area is tightly sealed off from the rest of the home to contain spores and dust migration. This can be done using plastic barriers and high-capacity fans equipped with HEPA filters (commonly referred to as "negative air machines" or "air scrubbers") to exhaust air outside of the home.

The handling or disturbance of contaminated materials should only be performed by workers wearing respirators and hazmat suits. Any clothing exposed to spore-laden dust should be bagged in the enclosure and carried out in the same manner as the contaminated waste. In most circumstances, clothing can be cleaned and worn again.

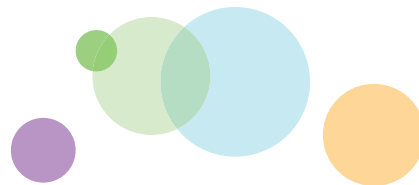
Ideally, you would first hire an independent mold assessment professional to pinpoint the source of mold growth, and then draft a scope-of-work document for the remediator to follow. This assessment professional, who should work directly for you—not for the remediator—should also perform a thorough, “white-glove” inspection and take air and surface samples after the job is complete, according to the contractor. If the testing reveals that any work must be redone, it should be at the expense of the remediator, not you.

more information?

There are literally thousands of websites offering information, and sometimes disinformation, about mold. The most reliable information can often be found on websites of government agencies and recognized scientific professional organizations.

[Click here](#) to go to our website for links to these organizations.

Now, it’s time to get busy inspecting your home.



SECTION 3:

the exterior inspection

getting started

Before you begin, read the inspection checklists thoroughly. If you wish to print the checklists separately, use the “print range” section in your print dialog box and enter pages 15-25.

look for the source of the water

For both your exterior and interior inspection, follow the potential sources of water. Look for signs of water staining and discoloration. Also, be aware of any mildew/musty odors and how they may correlate to the other signs you discover throughout your inspection.

It’s important to remember that our human senses are often the best mold detectors. It’s why we like to say, “If you see something, smell something or feel something, do something!” And don’t move too fast, you may miss something. This is the perfect time to get more familiar with your home. So slow down and engage your senses.

With your checklist in hand, go outside. If you have a fully detached home, take a walk all the way around it. If you live in a semi-detached row home, townhouse or condo, examine as much of the exterior as possible. If you live on the second floor or higher in a multi-family complex, you can ignore soil conditions, but do the rest of the exterior inspection.

beginning the inspection



1

THE TERRAIN

What is the terrain like? Does the home sit on a steep hill with a lot of soil uphill? Is it in a depression? Is drainage good all around, or are there pockets of persistently soggy soil after a rain? How close to the house are these areas?

2

MOISTURE

Look for any signs of excess moisture in the soil around the foundation, or on walls or soffits. Any discoloration of paint or siding materials can be an indication of moisture. Green is usually algae, while black may be mold. While exterior mold may not be a hazard, it is evidence of moisture.

3

THE FOUNDATION

Examine the foundation carefully. You're looking for cracks, deterioration and excess soil elevation that puts earth in contact with the siding. If you can't see the foundation all the way around due to soil buildup or vegetation, that's noteworthy. Look at the slope of the soil relative to the foundation. If it slopes away, that's good; if it slopes toward the structure, that's a danger sign. Also examine any basement window wells, to see if they are holding water. If they are, that water is seeping into your basement wall and could be causing a problem indoors.

4

THE ROOF & GUTTERS

Look up! Examine every gutter and downspout for signs of clogging, leakage or breakage. Do the gutters drain close to the house? Check eaves, soffits and fascia for damage or discoloration. Are tree branches crowding the roof and/or walls, or touching the house? Is anything peeling, deteriorating, rotting, or damaged? If you can see the roof, does it appear in good condition, or are shingles or tiles cracked, lifting, curling or raised in any way? Pay special attention to any place where a roof joins the wall of another section.

5

SPRINKLERS

If there is a sprinkler system for watering lawns or gardens, are any sprinkler heads close to the house? Do any sprinklers spray the side of the house when the system is turned on? Are exterior faucets and hoses dry? Look for puddling, dripping and leaking in these areas.

6

DECKS, PORCHES, BALCONIES, PATIOS

Inspect any decks, porches, balconies or patios and their covers that make contact with the house. These all should slope away from the home and should be constructed so that water cannot get between them and the house itself.



Take your time with this phase. Go around several times until you are satisfied you have answered all applicable questions on the checklist.

what to look for during the inspection



Rain gutter and sprinkler heads located too close to the home. Note algae growth.



Heavy vegetation against the exterior wall potentially causing moisture intrusion.



Exterior damage to window sill potentially causing moisture intrusion.



Decking potentially causing moisture intrusion where deck contacts the wall.



Exterior moisture causing algae growth on stucco wall. Note: concrete patio is covering the lower part of the stucco.



Staining caused by sprinklers spraying the side of the home.

SECTION 4:

the exterior inspection checklist



Take your time with this phase. Go around several times until you are satisfied you have answered all applicable questions on the checklist.

NOTE: When any exterior conditions are noted, pay special attention to interior conditions on the other side of the same wall.

| CONDITIONS | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | POSSIBLE, BUT NOT SURE | CONDITION DEFINITELY PRESENT |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Does the home sit on a steep hillside or have poor drainage? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does the lot slope toward the home? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rain gutters drain against the home or into planter boxes? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gutters or downspouts clogged, leaking or broken? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sprinkler heads less than 4 inches from the walls of the home? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any sprinkler heads spray water directly onto exterior walls? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vegetation contacting walls of the home? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Soil or elevated planter boxes contacting the stucco or siding ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do any concrete patios directly contact the stucco or siding ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are any sides of the homes chronically wet or water stained? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are any leaking hose bibs or sprinkler valves in the yard ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any foundation or walls showing green algae growth? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vegetation or vines in direct contact with the exterior walls? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Foundation walls buried so soil contacts the siding? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are any cracks present on the exterior of the home? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Exterior walls show evidence of bubbling or peeling paint? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cracks or peeling on exterior window ledges or door frames ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Discoloration or peeling paint around deck /home contact areas? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Decks or patio covering fastened directly to walls of the home? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dry rot or termite damage to exterior wood surfaces? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trees touching or heavily shading the roof or walls? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Total Number of Each Condition: _____

Enter the location(s) with the most severe moisture conditions _____

If you found signs of moisture intrusion or potential moisture intrusion in your exterior inspection, make careful note of the location(s) and the corresponding interior areas. During your interior inspection, you should focus on these locations and probe for indications of moisture and/or mold growth.

SECTION 5:

the interior inspection

what you'll need

First, get a strong flashlight, and be prepared to move furniture that sits against an exterior wall or anywhere moisture might form (a wall adjoining a bathroom, for example).

If you have identified any problem areas outside, go first to the interior spaces closest to those areas and examine them for signs of moisture or mold. If you are aware of any past water events—a plumbing leak, broken water heater, a major spill, a roof, wall, window or door leak—pay special attention to these areas.

telltale signs

1

STAINS, DISCOLORATION, AND/OR BLISTERING PAINT

Look for:

- staining or discoloration on walls, baseboards or window sills
- blistering, peeling, or bubbling paint
- dark spots or speckles on walls

Be sure to look carefully behind furniture that shares an exterior wall and in closets. Dark places with little air movement are favorite places for mold to thrive. Cobwebs are also an indicator of possible excess moisture; spiders that make the cobwebs eat many of the uninvited critters that are attracted to dampness. Heavily shaded or leaky areas outside can cause condensation and moisture in wall spaces, providing just the right environment for dust mites—and mold.

2

HEADS OF DRYWALL NAILS OR SCREWS

Keep an eye out for faint (or not so faint) nail heads or screws in your drywall. And for vertical lines of the wall studs, sometimes referred to as “ghosting.” These can be indications of high humidity.

3

MUSTY ODORS

Your nose is an excellent indicator of trouble areas. Though humans pale in comparison to specially trained dogs—aka Mold Dogs, who can detect the key components of mold and pinpoint exactly where the source is—most of us know a musty odor when we sniff it. Be aware of odors and where they generally exist.

beginning the inspection



After you have examined known “water event” locations and any areas corresponding to exterior signs of moisture intrusion, begin a more general survey. Remember to use your flashlight and to look in places you normally don’t see, such as behind large pieces of furniture and inside closets, cabinets, utility enclosures and crawl spaces. If anything looks suspicious, make a note of it.

general survey

1

COMMON AREAS

Begin your general survey in common living areas: entryway, foyer, hallway, living room, dining room, family room and anywhere else people congregate or pass through frequently.

2

BEDROOMS

Next are the sleeping areas, perhaps the most important because you likely spend more time in bed than any other location. If anyone in the house is chronically ill, spend extra time in that person’s bedroom.

3

BATHROOMS, KITCHEN, UTILITY AREAS

Any place with a water supply is likely to have some excess moisture, which is the key ingredient for mold growth. Look and smell carefully under sinks, behind toilets, and in plumbing access spaces behind tubs and showers. Examine tile and grout for gaps, discoloration, cracks and loose pieces. Check the edges of vinyl flooring or linoleum for signs of water seepage or accumulation beneath the material.

4

BASEMENT, CRAWL SPACE, ATTICS

In the basement or basement crawlspaces, look for puddling, standing water, dampness, discoloration and, of course, musty odor. Inspect foundation walls closely for white crystals or powder covering the masonry. This is called efflorescence, the result of water outside the foundation forcing its way through the masonry and carrying the mineral salts from the masonry with it. Efflorescence indicates poor drainage or excess groundwater on the outside.

If the basement is finished, look closely at the baseboard trim and the areas around the perimeter where the floor meets the wall. Also, pull back the corners of the carpet to look at the tack strips. If you notice rusty tacks or discoloration, you likely have a problem here. Water stains and deterioration along the bottom few inches of the wallboard or paneling are also significant red flags.

In an attic or attic crawlspaces, look for signs of condensation, such as rusty roofing nails, rust stains on the insulation or decking that might indicate water dripping from roofing nails, and blackened or gray lumber. Pay special attention to the north face of the roof and to any area where you observed heavy shading in your exterior survey. If possible, examine any kitchen or bathroom exhaust fan ducts to make sure they are vented properly to the outside, ideally via the roof. Make sure all dryer vents exhaust outside and are free of obstructions. If you hang your clothes to dry indoors, be aware that these areas present high risk for a humidity problem and potential mold growth.

By now, you should have all that you need to fill out the interior checklist, which can be found beginning on page 20.

what to look for during the inspection



Condensation causing mold growth inside of window tracks and on metal framings.



Exterior moisture intrusion causing mold growth and water staining on lower wall.



Moisture intrusion under sliding glass door causing mold growth on carpeting.



Exterior moisture intrusion causing mold growth on baseboard, wall, and carpeting.



Mold growth on leather goods stored in a closet located on an exterior wall.



Mold growth on a wicker planter located on carpeting.



Water damage and mold growth from a **leaking shower assembly**.



Water damage and mold growth around a **leaking wax seal at the base of toilet**.



Severe mold growth under a kitchen sink from a **leaking supply valve in the wall**.



Mold growth and water damage along **carpet tack strips in front of a shower**.



Water damage on garage ceiling from a **leaking water supply line**.



Mold growth and water damage from a **leaking water heater on A/C pedestal**.

[See more →](#)

SECTION 6:

the interior inspection checklist

PART ONE: LIVING AREAS

| CONDITIONS | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | WATER STAINING | VISIBLE MOLD GROWTH |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ENTRY AND HALLWAY AREAS | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LIVING ROOM | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| DINING ROOM | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| FAMILY ROOM | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Total Number of Each Living Area Condition: _____ | | | |
| Do any rooms contain mold growth greater than one square foot? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Do any rooms contain water stains greater than ten square feet? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Additionally →

Rooms with the most severe moisture conditions _____

THE INTERIOR INSPECTION CHECKLIST

PART TWO: SLEEPING AREAS

| CONDITIONS | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | WATER STAINING | VISIBLE MOLD GROWTH |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| MASTER BEDROOM | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BEDROOM #2 – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BEDROOM #3 – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BEDROOM #4 – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth in closet areas or contents? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Total Number of Each Sleeping Area Condition: _____ | | | |
| Do any rooms contain mold growth greater than one square foot? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Do any rooms contain water stains greater than ten square feet? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Additionally →

Rooms with the most severe moisture conditions _____

THE INTERIOR INSPECTION CHECKLIST

PART THREE: KITCHEN AND UTILITY AREAS

| CONDITIONS | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | WATER STAINING | VISIBLE MOLD GROWTH |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| KITCHEN | | | |
| Staining or mold growth present on ceiling, walls, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth around sink , dishwasher, refrigerator? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LAUNDRY ROOM | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth on walls, flooring or water supply/drains? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| WATER HEATER / FURNACE / AIR CONDITIONING UNITS | | | |
| Staining, mold growth or rust on ceiling walls, flooring around units? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth around pedestal or inside units (see page 14)? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Total Number of Each Kitchen and Utility Area Condition: | | | |
| | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Additionally →

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Do any rooms contain mold growth greater than one square foot? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do any rooms contain water stains greater than ten square feet? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> |

Rooms with the most severe moisture conditions _____

THE INTERIOR INSPECTION CHECKLIST

PART FOUR: BATHROOM AREAS

| CONDITIONS | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | WATER STAINING | VISIBLE MOLD GROWTH |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| MASTER BATHROOM | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth around tub, toilet, or water supply valves? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth under the sink? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BATHROOM #2 – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth around tub, toilet, or water supply valves? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth under the sink? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BATHROOM #3 – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rust present on ceiling or lighting fixtures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold on baseboards, carpeting, tack strip, or flooring? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth around tub, toilet, or water supply valves? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining or mold growth under the sink? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Total Number of Each Bathroom Condition: | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Additionally →

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Do any rooms contain mold growth greater than one square foot? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do any rooms contain water stains greater than ten square feet? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> |

Rooms with the most severe moisture conditions _____

THE INTERIOR INSPECTION CHECKLIST

PART FIVE: BASEMENT, ATTIC, and CRAWL SPACES

| CONDITIONS | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | WATER STAINING | VISIBLE MOLD GROWTH |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| BASEMENT – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rusty nails present on structural lumber? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Efflorescence or moisture on foundation walls? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Standing water, puddles, etc.? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ATTIC – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rusty nails present on structural lumber? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on any surface? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rusty roofing nails or rust stains on decking below nails? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Damp insulation? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty Odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CRAWL SPACE – DESCRIPTION _____ | | | |
| Staining, mold growth, or rusty nails present on structural lumber? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staining, condensation, or mold present on walls, windows or blinds? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Efflorescence or moisture on foundation walls? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Musty odor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Standing water, puddles, etc.? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Falling insulation? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Total Number of Each Basement, Attic, and Crawl Space Condition: _____ | | | |

Additionally →

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Do any rooms contain mold growth greater than one square foot? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do any rooms contain water stains greater than ten square feet? | NO: <input type="checkbox"/> | YES: <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rooms with the most severe moisture conditions _____ | | |

Totals

| EXTERIOR INSPECTION | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | WATER STAINING | VISIBLE MOLD GROWTH |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Total Number of Each Condition: | _____ | _____ | _____ |

| INTERIOR INSPECTION | NO, OR NOT KNOWN | WATER STAINING | VISIBLE MOLD GROWTH |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Total Number of Each Living Area Condition: | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Total Number of Each Sleeping Area Condition: | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Total Number of Each Kitchen and Utility Area Condition: | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Total Number of Each Bathroom Area Condition: | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Total Number of Each Basement, Attic, and Crawl Space Condition: | _____ | _____ | _____ |

SECTION 6:

frequently asked questions

1. Why use a home test kit?
2. What types of tests are included in the test kit?
3. What are the limitations of the GOT MOLD? Test Kit?
4. What is mold?
5. What are the most common symptoms of exposure to mold?
6. Why is mold a bigger problem today, than 20 years ago?
7. Is mold dangerous and who is at risk when exposed to mold?
8. What does mold smell like?
9. What does mold look like?
10. Which types of molds do we need to be concerned about?
11. What is the role of mold in nature?
12. Where does mold grow?
13. What does mold need to grow?
14. Why does mold appear to grow on non-organic surfaces?
15. When and where do we come in contact with mold?
16. When does mold grow indoors?
17. What are the potential sources of moisture in and around my home?
18. How long does it take for mold to grow?
19. Can my own household activities cause mold growth?
20. How should I respond to a flood in my home?
21. What is the best way to remove mold contaminated materials?
22. Where can I get more information on mold?

Turn the page to find out the answers →

1. Why use a home test kit?

The GOT MOLD? Test Kit is a cost-effective screening tool designed to empower and educate you about the presence and potential danger from mold in your home, or any other indoor environment.

The test kit will help you decide whether or not calling a professional inspection or testing company is warranted. This could save you thousands of dollars. To have a professional mold inspector gather the samples and deliver the results you can get from this kit would typically cost more than \$1,200.

When used accordingly, the GOT MOLD? Test Kit can help you determine:

- if you might have a mold problem
- the types of molds present
- whether or not a professional mold assessment is advisable

The GOT MOLD? Test Kit cannot determine the exact amount of mold present in your home, nor provide the nuanced reporting of a professional testing firm, it will give you an excellent indication of current conditions inside your home and is a valuable, if not indispensable, first step if you suspect a mold problem.

How does the test kit collect samples?

Air Samples

The GOT MOLD? Test Kit collects air samples using a methodology known as spore traps, which capture the microscopic particles floating through the air at the time and place of sampling. This is the most common type of professional air sampling for mold.

3. What are the limitations of the GOT MOLD Test Kit?

As with any type of indoor air sampling system, accuracy is subject to an array of factors that can change from minute to minute, like ventilation and movement within the building. As such, the results from this kit should not be considered a definitive measure of exposure or risk, nor as the determining factor of a building's safety. Furthermore, since spore traps are designed to capture spores floating around in the ambient air, a hidden mold problem—say in a wall—may go undetected. Similarly, if air in the room has been still for quite some time, spores may have settled.

The GOT MOLD? Test Kit is not a substitute for a mold inspection performed by a qualified professional. Its purpose is to be a cost-effective first step similar to an at-home pregnancy test kit. Just as you wouldn't start buying baby furniture and clothes immediately following a positive at-home pregnancy test, the same logic should apply here. No major life decisions, such as planning remediation, filing lawsuits, relocating, etc., should be based solely upon the results of this test kit.

If a mold issue is detected using this kit, and you intend to take action, it's highly recommended you seek out a qualified mold assessment professional to perform a thorough physical inspection, additional testing, and provide a comprehensive report with observations, recommendations, and a remediation plan.

In all cases, if you are experiencing health issues that you think may be building-related, please seek medical advice.

4. What is mold?

Molds are living organisms, microscopic in size and grow similar to plants feeding on decaying or dead organic material.

Molds are present on most surfaces around us and also serve helpful purposes, but it can be harmful if allowed to grow out of control.

Molds produce billions of spores—their version of seeds—which are carried on air currents, enabling them to grow in other locations and reproduce. These spores give each type of mold its distinct color and appearance. About 1,000,000,000 (1 billion) spores can fit comfortably into one square inch!

5. What are the most common symptoms of exposure to mold?

Common symptoms associated with short-term exposure:

- Allergies
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Wheezing
- Asthma attacks
- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Sinusitis
- Itchy eyes
- Hives
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating

Symptoms associated with chronic exposure include:

- Frequent respiratory infections
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Confusion
- Severe fatigue
- Weight gain
- Night terrors
- Anger “mold rage”
- Cognitive problems
- Memory loss
- Brain fog
- Hair loss
- Tinnitus

Diagnoses closely related to chronic mold exposure:

- CIRS
- MTHFR gene mutation
- Chronic sinusitis
- Lyme
- Fibromyalgia
- ME/CFS
- Sarcoidosis

6. Why is mold a bigger problem today than 20 years ago?

New construction methods and materials were developed to comply with Title 24 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations (1978), focusing on energy conservation. The new building methods and construction materials do not allow buildings to ventilate, or “breathe,” as freely as before. The result is that moisture vapor can become trapped if sufficient ventilation systems are not in place, providing the basis for mold growth.

When a house is built on a concrete slab, the concrete emits moisture depending upon surrounding conditions. Concrete slabs are porous, allowing moisture present in the soil beneath the slab to migrate into the living area above.

Legal issues attributed to mold are now in the news more than ever before. Owners selling or renting properties, are being held responsible for not informing tenants as to possible mold problems. Since mold can grow from minor water problems as seemingly innocuous as wet inside plant baskets or damp laundry hung indoors, or from larger problems such as plumbing failures and roof leaks, it's imperative property owners stay ahead of the mold curve.

7. Is mold dangerous, and who is at risk when exposed to mold?

There's no cut and dry answer to this question. Mold exposure affects everyone differently. The most at risk are the very young, the very old, and anyone who is already experiencing health problems. Also, the type of exposure is important. An acute but brief exposure is far different than one in which someone is chronically exposed - such as living or working in a moldy building. This tends to lead to very different outcomes and symptom sets.

Molds are allergens, so for people with sensitivities along these lines, mold can trigger the typical allergic responses one would expect, ranging from upper respiratory irritation to dermal (skin) reactions and itchy eyes. These symptoms usually subside once the mold or moisture problem is remediated.

Of greater concern is how mold exposure can exacerbate pre-existing illnesses, such as asthma and other serious respiratory disease. Asthma attacks, for example, kill people every day. There's no way to know how many of these deaths are caused by mold, but this should not be taken lightly, and exposure must be kept to a minimum for people who fall into this category.

Of greatest concern is how mold can affect the people with a compromised immune system. This would include anyone with cancer, diabetes, hepatitis, recent transplant recipients, etc. This population is at risk of potentially lethal fungal infections, where the highest vigilance must be maintained.

There's also a large and growing segment of the population (3-5%) who are sensitive to environmental toxins, including mold and its byproducts. The symptoms are wide-ranging and poorly understood by the medical community at large, but research is emerging, and the awareness is becoming more mainstream. Diagnoses like Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome (CIRS) are the most common, and while treatment methods vary, in all cases, strict avoidance of mold environments is a given.

For most people, exposure is unlikely to cause serious illnesses in the normal home setting with healthy individuals, but as a general rule, it's best to avoid indoor mold growth altogether.

8. What does mold smell like?

When a musty smell is present, mold growth may be present. However, a musty smell by itself does not automatically indicate the presence of mold growth or a hazardous condition. The presence of moisture on organic surfaces in a home, especially carpeting, will give off a wide range of musty odors from a variety of organic sources including pets, dander, bacteria and other forms of biological decay. There are certain molds that give off identifiable odors to a trained expert, but most musty odors in a home are from a combination of sources.

9. What does mold look like?

Mold spores are not visible to the naked eye. Spores are smaller than the smallest sand grains and as many as 10,000,000 (ten million) could fit on the head of a pin! They occur in various colors and shapes. When the conditions are right, a spore will land on a surface and begins to grow, much like a seed does. As it takes hold, it will form colonies, and as they proliferate, mold becomes visible.

Mold growth is usually present as mottled colonies or irregular surface discolorations having a fuzzy texture. The color of the mold growth is most often the direct result of the chemicals and pigments within the spores themselves. It's estimated there are nearly 100,000 species, and they vary widely in their appearance. Most people have heard of black mold, which is usually a reference to the most notorious of all molds, *Stachybotrys Chartarum*. This type is also commonly referred to as "toxic mold" because of the potent chemicals (mycotoxins) it sometimes produces. But the reality is, many molds are black and most of them do not produce mycotoxins, so the color of the mold doesn't help in terms of determining the severity of a mold problem. In fact, most of the other toxin-producing species are not black. Commonly, they are light in color, often yellowish or green, and can resemble dust.

The bottom line: Regardless of the color or species, mold growth indoors, of any significance, is cause for concern and immediate action.

10. Which types of molds do we need to be most concerned about? What about 'Toxic Mold'?

Although there has been significant media hype and hysteria regarding the black mold *Stachybotrys Chartarum* - often called "toxic mold" - there's more to the story.

Stachybotrys is known as a water damage indicator, which means that it grows only in chronically damp environments. If *Stachybotrys* is in your environment, there's a history of significant uncontrolled moisture in that area.

What the media routinely fails to communicate is that dampness indoors is the actual enemy. It's dampness that kicks off a cascade of biological growth. And while *Stachybotrys* may be the current reigning champ, make no mistake, all of the other stuff that grows in chronic dampness is unhealthy, too.

Current data suggests that elevated airborne spores of any kind create an undesirable condition. Focusing on one species misses the larger issue, the one that needs correcting: dampness indoors.

And the cleanup method doesn't change from mold to mold. It's all the same. So keep your eye on the prize. A mold problem is a moisture problem. Mold is just a symptom.

11. What is the role of mold in nature?

Mold is nature's recycler. Outdoors, molds, mushrooms and other fungi are responsible for the decay of organic material, such as wood, leaves, flowers, or animal tissue.

When mold is found inside homes, it does exactly the same thing—it starts to devour the material on which it is living. If left untreated, it will slowly eat away the organic and construction materials in your home!

12. Where does mold grow?

Outdoors it can be found naturally on dead plants, leaves, soils, woods, etc. And indoors, even in the newest and cleanest of houses, all the necessary elements for mold growth are there.

A majority of environmental professionals agree that indoor mold spore concentrations, on average, are lower than concentrations outdoors, provided we have healthy living conditions. In a "clean" home, mold concentrations usually range from 10 to 5,000 spores per square inch on horizontal surfaces, to 200 to 5,000 spores per cubic meter in the air. When severe mold contamination is present, however, indoor mold spore concentrations often exceed 100,000 spores per cubic meter of air.

13. What does mold need to grow?

Food

Mold needs an organic source of food, such as: wood, fabric, leather, fiberboard, drywall, insulation material, ceiling tiles, paint textiles, dirt and dust, and paper adhesives.

Mold will sometimes appear to grow on non-organic surfaces, like glass, tile or stone. Mold found on these surfaces live off organic debris such as dust, oil films, dirt, skin cells, etc., deposited on the surface.

Water

Mold requires a certain amount of surface moisture and, depending on the type of mold, a sustained relative humidity of 50% to 80%.

Warmth

Mold is happiest where we are generally happiest – in a warm, cozy place (60 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit).

14. When and where do we come in contact with mold?

Mold is, in a word, everywhere. We come in contact with mold every single day of our lives. Most contact takes place unnoticed. We routinely inhale naturally occurring molds outdoors, or mold found indoors as a result of outdoor infiltration of spores. Often, indoor exposure to mold is the result of our own living habits or common household items such as moldy food, potted plants, or damp clothing and towels. Only if mold is found in highly visible or accessible areas are we likely to notice.

15. When does mold grow indoors?

Mold growth can occur indoors whenever excess moisture accumulates and is not fully dried within 24-48 hours.

Extensive mold growth is likely following a major water leak, such as a burst pipe, sewer backflow, tub overflow, or after putting out a fire. However, minor events can also cause significant mold growth if not properly addressed.

16. What are the potential sources of moisture in and around my home?

There are numerous indoor and outdoor sources that may cause unwanted moisture in your home.

Exterior

- Leaking faucets or sprinkler valves
- Water ponding next to the home
- Roof or chimney leaks
- Water, vegetation or debris accumulating on roof
- Vegetation next to or growing on the home
- Sprinkler heads too close to the side of the house
- Absence of rain gutters, or downspouts not draining away from the house
- Accumulation of dirt and debris on window ledges
- Window and door leaks
- Damaged or leaky siding; improper drainage of siding
- Damp garage, basement
- Damp or poorly ventilated crawl space
- Sewer backed up
- Soil sloping towards house

Interior

- Leaking faucets or water valves
- Inadequately sealed toilet
- Insufficient caulking around tub and shower
- Storage of garbage under the sink
- Steam from cooking and dishwasher
- Leaking water valves or lines under sink or water conditioning units
- Leaking air conditioning condensate lines
- Inadequate bathroom ventilation
- Bathroom exhaust fan venting into attic space
- Carpeted bathrooms
- Potted plants, especially when in wicker baskets
- Accumulation of dirt and dust on window ledges and panes
- Wet clothes drying indoors
- Clothes dryer vented indoors
- Dirty heating and air-conditioning (HVAC) ducts
- Spilled liquids on carpeted surfaces
- Poor carpet cleaning job (excess moisture left behind)
- Condensation in attic
- Dampness in closets, especially on the ground floor next to exterior walls, or adjacent to bathrooms
- High humidity levels in any room
- Excessive use of humidifiers

17. How long does it take for mold to grow?

The time varies for each different type of mold, but some types can start growing within 24 hours of a water event. In most cases the growth will not become visible for several days.

18. Can my own household activities cause mold growth?

The answer is yes. Inattention to routine cleaning and maintenance of heating, air conditioning and water utilities in and around your home can all contribute to elevated moisture and eventual mold growth. The following are the most common causes of “household” mold growth caused by inadequate cleaning or maintenance:

- Dirty HVAC system
- Dryer vented indoors
- Wet clothes drying indoors
- Garbage stored under the kitchen sink
- Inadequate bathroom ventilation, or bathroom exhaust vented into attic
- Moisture from dishwasher
- Steam from cooking, baths, and showers
- Indoor plants
- Loose or missing caulking around bathtubs and shower
- Moisture from incomplete carpet cleaning
- Chronic plumbing leaks
- The use of carpeting in bathrooms
- Infrequent cleaning of carpeting and window ledges
- Pets
- Any excessive humidity

19. How should I respond to a flood in my home?

ACT IMMEDIATELY! The quicker cleanup and drying takes place, the less water and mold damage there will be. Naturally, the smaller the damage is, the less costly it will be to clean and repair. Discard wet cardboard boxes and make sure all of the following are dried immediately:

- Wet clothing
- Wet carpet padding and carpeting
- Baseboards and drywall
- The underside and back of cabinets

If the flooding is extensive, immediately call a professional restoration company

REMEMBER: Mold growth can start within 24 hours of a water event.

20. What is the best way to remove mold-contaminated materials?

Although small and localized areas of mold growth can often be removed by the homeowner, it is important that all affected materials be removed and the source of the moisture fixed. This usually requires hiring a qualified restoration or remediation professional. Make sure the area is sealed off from the rest of the home to contain spores and dust migration. Use plastic barriers and high capacity fans equipped with HEPA filters (commonly referred to as “negative air machines” or “air scrubbers”) to exhaust air outside of the home. The handling or disturbance of mold contaminated materials should only be performed wearing a properly fitted dust mask or respirator. Homeowners should purchase dust masks rated by NIOSH as N-95 or 95% efficient. Gloves and goggles are also strongly recommended. Any clothing exposed to spore-laden dust should be washed immediately after use.

21. Where can I get more information on mold?

There are literally thousands of websites offering information, and sometimes disinformation, about mold. The most reliable information can often be found on websites of government agencies and recognized scientific professional organizations. Click below for a treasure trove of links to these agencies and organizations.

To find out more, go to www.gotmold.com/learning-center →

SECTION 7:

when—and how—to hire a mold inspector

There are certain circumstances when the GOT MOLD?Test Kit will reveal that a mold problem does indeed exist, but is unhelpful in pinpointing the exact source location. This is when professional guidance is in your best interest.

Additional inspection and/or testing by a qualified inspector and laboratory may be required if any of the following conditions are found as a result of your own inspection or testing results. You should take into account your visual inspection as well as the surface and air testing results.

exterior visual inspection

- When more than five Y (yes) conditions are noted on the Exterior Inspection form, or
- When more than ten P (possible) conditions are noted on the Exterior Inspection form.

interior visual inspection

- When one or more M (mold growth) locations contain approximately greater than one square foot of visible mold growth, or
- When three or more M (mold growth) locations are tabulated in either the “interior” or “sleeping” areas on the form, or
- When any significant water-staining conditions—approximately 10 square feet or greater—are noted in the living or sleeping spaces within the home.

your lab results

- When your air sampling results indicate elevated total mold spore concentrations relative to the indoor sample, and the source of the condition cannot be immediately identified or addressed by yourself.

a few examples...

1. If you use this kit and nothing unusual is found during analysis, despite a musty smell and a history of dampness or water damage, you may have a hidden mold problem requiring investigation. Hidden mold can be tricky, and the sources of moisture elusive. This is work best left to experienced and qualified professionals.
2. If the test results come back with abnormally high levels of mold, yet you are not sure of the source or how to proceed with repairs or remediation, a professional will be able to help get you on the right track and answer the important questions.
3. If someone is experiencing persistent health issues consistent with mold exposure when they are indoors.

inspectors & remediators

In the world of mold, you have mold inspectors and mold remediators.

The mold inspector should:

- perform the initial inspection
- collect samples for analysis
- diagnose the underlying defects causing the moisture problem(s)
- design a solution
- prepare a work plan
- oversee the remediation project as your consultant
- perform clearance testing and inspections at the end to make sure the mold remediation project was successful

The mold remediator should:

- follow the inspector's work plan
- isolate the work area
- carefully remove building materials or items that cannot be cleaned
- clean what is left
- restore the property back to a normal status

In an ideal world, inspectors and remediators would always remain separate, except to pass along data or as a check on one another's work. But many companies in the mold industry perform both testing and remediation services. The industry standard (IICRC S520 Mold Remediation Standard) clearly dictates the importance of keeping these services separate, but laws have not been put in place to enforce this standard. The mold inspector, or environmental consultant, should be an independent party working directly for, and in the best interest of the customer. Under no circumstances should a remediation company perform its own clearance testing at the end of a project.

The reasons for this are obvious. A disreputable inspector/remediator can walk into anyone's home, "find" a mold problem and "remediate" the problem, charging thousands of dollars when perhaps there is no mold problem at all. Another common occurrence is for a sloppy remediator to spread mold all over your house in the process of fixing a problem. Not only is the issue unresolved, it's now worse!

As of this writing, government regulation of mold testing and remediation does not exist in most states or on a Federal basis—so doing your homework is crucial!

how do you find a professional mold inspector? where do you start?

There are several well-respected non-profit organizations that provide training and a list of certified inspectors on their websites. The Indoor Air Quality Association (www.iaqa.org) and the Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification, known as the IICRC (www.iicrc.org), are good places to start. Keep in mind that, though education is crucial, most certifications are practically worthless unless they're backed up by significant field experience.

Your local department of health can sometimes be helpful in finding a professional in your area.

A professional mold inspector should be able to provide you with:

- Certifications, field experience, expert witness testimony, etc.
- A firm pricing schedule for services
- Insurance certificate and applicable licenses
- References

You should also consider contacting the Department of Consumer Affairs and your local Better Business Bureau before hiring anyone, just to confirm they aren't the subject of unresolved complaints.

Beware of inspectors who rely too heavily on air sampling. Air sampling is just one piece of the puzzle. And think twice about companies that do not specialize in mold, or home inspectors and pest control professionals who also "do mold." There is more to a proper mold assessment than taking a few air samples and snooping around with a flashlight.

Here are a few questions you can ask a prospective mold inspector to help separate the professionals from the amateurs.

1. What standards do you follow during a mold inspection?

Right answer: IICRC S520 Mold Remediation Standard

Wrong answer: EPA Guidelines or NYC Dept of Health Guidelines.

The EPA and NYC Dept of Health offer guidelines for remediation and assessment. But these are guidelines, not standards. The only true industry standard that exists is the IICRC S520 Mold Remediation Standard. An inspector who doesn't know this is not for you.

2. Do you also perform remediation or repairs?

A "yes" answer here is a red flag, as we explained above. A company that performs inspections and testing as well as repairs and remediation is highly suspect. There are simply too many opportunities for abuse and conflicts-of-interest. What you want is an independent inspection company that will be your advocate and help you navigate the unknown waters of mold remediation with no ulterior motives. An inspector who is also a remediator is the equivalent of a police officer who is also a judge. A system of checks and balances is essential for ensuring a positive outcome.

3. Do you have Professional Liability (E&O) insurance and Contractor's Pollution Liability insurance?

Make sure you see proof of this. Even a routine mold inspection procedure can accidentally disturb mold growth and send it airborne. A sloppy or inaccurate report can cost you far more than the mold inspection. Professionals in the mold industry require specialized policies for a reason. Make sure the professional you choose has them.

A mold inspector must:

- Have proper training, including building science, and be current with continuing education requirements for any certifications or licenses (if applicable).
- Have specialized experience in dealing with mold and moisture problems. Mold is unlike other environmental hazards such as lead paint or radon. If a mold problem is not dealt with properly, it will often return, sometimes worse than before. Lead paint and asbestos never grow back.
- Follow the only consensus-accepted industry standard that exists—the IICRC S520 Mold Remediation Standard.
- Have proper insurance. Mold inspectors must have specialty insurance policies for the unique risks they face—specifically Professional Liability Insurance, otherwise known as Errors & Omissions (E&O). Contractor’s Pollution Liability insurance should also be part of their coverage.
- Maintain proper documentation.
- Be able to provide references for jobs of comparable size and scope.
- Be able to identify potential areas of hidden mold growth without invasive or destructive measures.

WARRANTY

MycoLab USA LLC warrants that all components will be free of defects and will replace any defective or missing parts at no cost. If you have any defective or missing parts, please call 1-800-838-1388.

DISCLAIMER

Like any self-administered mold test kit, this does not replace or serve as a substitute for professional testing or mold-assessment performed by a qualified environmental consultant. This kit was designed to serve as a first step.