MOISTURE IN THE HOME

This fact sheet provides answers to basic questions about moisture in homes. It will discuss where moisture comes from, how it can affect your home, and what you can do to prevent moisture problems in your home.

WHAT ARE SOME SOURCES OF MOISTURE IN MY HOME?

Moisture can come from several sources in and around your home:

- Plumbing, flashing, and roof leaks
- Damp basements and crawlspaces
- Cooking, showering, and indoor line drying of clothes
- Humidifiers
- Improperly vented combustion appliances and clothes dryers
- Flooding and sewage backups

HOW CAN MOISTURE AFFECT MY HOME?

Too much moisture in your home can cause the growth of mold. Mold can grow in or on almost anything in your home, including paper, carpet, wood, dry wall, insulation, mattresses, and shower curtains. Mold can also grow in improperly maintained air conditioners, humidifiers, and dehumidifiers. Excess moisture also provides a good environment for bacteria, cockroaches, and dust mites.

Moisture in your home also can cause other problems. Too much moisture can cause wood to rot, which may weaken the structure of your home. Moisture can even cause peeling, chipping, or cracking paint, which may contribute to high levels of lead in household dust, especially if your home was built before 1978.

HOW CAN MOISTURE IN MY HOME AFFECT MY HEALTH?

Mold, bacteria, cockroaches, and dust mites have been linked to triggering allergies and asthma attacks. Mold, bacteria, cockroaches, and dust mites may even cause children who do not have allergies or asthma to develop either condition. Symptoms that may suggest an asthma attack are frequent coughing and wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath.

Exposure to mold, bacteria, cockroaches, and dust mites also can cause watery eyes, a runny nose, nasal congestion, itching, and headaches.

Lead poisoning is the No. 1 environmental illness of children. Exposure to lead in household dust can cause behavioral disorders, learning problems, and slower growth in children.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MOLD AND OTHER MOISTURE PROBLEMS IN MY HOME?

Preventing moisture problems is the most important strategy you can use to control mold in your home. There are several simple ways to prevent moisture from becoming a problem in your home:

- Fix plumbing, flashing, and roof leaks promptly.

- Cover dirt in crawlspaces with plastic sheeting. Crawlspaces also should be well ventilated.

- Install exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms. *Always use* exhaust fans while cooking and showering.

- Vent exhaust fans, clothes dryers, and combustion appliances directly outside your home.

- Avoid the use of humidifiers, since they will add moisture to your home and can support bacteria and mold. If you must use a humidifier in your home, change the water daily and clean the tank weekly.

- Use air conditioners to control moisture during humid weather. Sometimes, dehumidifiers can also be helpful. However, air conditioners and dehumidifiers should also be cleaned and regularly maintained.

- Improve air circulation within your home by opening windows when weather permits, using fans, and keeping doors between rooms open.

- Prevent water from entering basements and crawlspaces by repairing holes and cracks in walls; use landscaping to direct water away from your foundation.

- Clean and maintain your gutters, and make sure drainpipes carry water several feet away from your home.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

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Division of Environmental Health

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