

Dealing with mould after a storm, flood or cyclone

Cyclones and floods are usually associated with excess moisture, long periods of heat and humidity, and pooling of water. These factors all help to create an environment that is favourable to the growth of moulds. People can be exposed to moulds through inhalation, skin contact or ingestion.

For some individuals, such as asthmatics or those with sensitivities or allergies, exposure to moulds may induce an adverse reaction or cause them to develop health problems. By reducing mould growth and by taking precautions when removing mould, you can help reduce the risk of mould-related health problems.



© thinkstock.com.au

Recognising mould

In some instances mould can be readily seen because of the discolouration it causes to walls, ceilings and other surfaces. However, sometimes mould may not be readily visible but can be detected by a musty, unpleasant odour.

Preventing mould growth

When returning to a flood-affected house or building, dry it out as quickly as possible by opening all the doors and windows. If possible use fans to speed up the process.

Porous items that can't be easily cleaned and have been wet for more than two days should be discarded. This includes items such as mattresses, carpet, food, leather goods and ceiling insulation.

Moisture control is the single most effective method for controlling mould growth. In high rainfall areas this is difficult to achieve, but other contributing factors—such as leaky plumbing, roofs and other fixtures— should be repaired as soon as possible. If repainting walls or other hard surfaces that are prone to mould growth, anti-mould solutions can be added into paint to help retard mould growth. Ask your painter or hardware supplier for details.

Vegetation growing on or close to outside walls helps to hold in moisture and promote mould growth. Try to clear vegetation and soil away from walls.

Cleaning mould from surfaces

Abrasively cleaning mould from a surface, such as with a dry brush, is *not* recommended as this could release spores into the air which may cause adverse health affects and spread mould to other areas. There are many products which are effective for killing and removing mould from walls, floors and other hard surfaces. Household cleaning agents or detergents can do an effective job if used correctly, as can white fermented vinegar cleaning solution. The use of bleach is not recommended as it is ineffective in killing mould. However, bleach will help to eliminate other disease-causing organisms that may be present because of contaminated floodwaters. The mixing of cleaning agents is not recommended; for example, mixing bleach and ammonia can produce toxic fumes.

Items that can be washed, such as stuffed toys and linen, should be washed as usual. If in doubt, take the items to a professional cleaner or discard it in accordance with your local government's waste disposal methods.

Non-porous items such as glassware and some plastics can be washed in hot water with a bleach solution or with a good quality disinfectant and air dried. If using a dishwasher, clean and disinfect it first. Do the wash using a full cycle and hot water.

Air conditioning and other ventilation units are excellent environments for the growth of moulds and other bacteria. Using the unit without having had it properly cleaned first may result in mould spores becoming airborne and being inhaled or distributed to other parts of the building. It is advisable to have these units serviced by a qualified technician after a flood.

Protecting yourself

Wearing good quality rubber gloves while sorting and cleaning mouldy items will protect the hands and nails from coming into contact with mould. You can protect your eyes by using safety goggles with closed-in sides.

If your clean-up is extensive or if you have sensitivities, try to obtain an N95/P2 disposable respirator. Unlike conventional dust masks that only provide protection against large particulates, these masks protect against microscopic spores and bacteria. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions and fit the mask properly. Wear protective clothing that can be disposed of or easily washed.



© thinkstock.com.au

Further information:

- Queensland Health
www.health.qld.gov.au/disaster
- Emergency Management Queensland
www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/mold/
- Contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit.

For general information, contact your local Queensland Health public health unit.

Brisbane South	Tel: 3000 9148	Hervey Bay	Tel: 4120 6000	Rockhampton	Tel: 4920 6989
Bundaberg	Tel: 4303 7500	Mackay	Tel: 4885 6611	Sunshine Coast	Tel: 5409 6600
Central West	Tel: 4303 7500	Metro North		Toowoomba	Tel: 4753 9000
Cairns	Tel: 4226 5555	• Brisbane Office	Tel: 3624 1111	West Moreton	Tel: 3413 1200
Charleville	Tel: 4656 8100	• Moreton Bay	Tel: 3142 1800		
Gold Coast	Tel: 5668 3700	Mount Isa	Tel: 4744 9100		