

# LHO GUIDE: MOLD



Mold is a fungal growth that forms and spreads on various kinds of damp or decaying organic matter. It is normal to find mold both outdoors and indoors, but excessive growth of mold indoors can become a public health issue. Sensitivity to mold varies from person to person; for some it can cause allergies and breathing issues. Excess mold is caused by excess moisture; fixing a mold problem will always involve remedying the underlying moisture issue as well.

**LHOs can assist residents and owners** by providing public health education, including the association of mold and moisture problems, by verifying mold concerns with inspection when indicated and by providing mediation and communication assistance to advance resolution steps and guide enforcement where needed. Working with your CEO/LPI colleagues could be helpful whenever water leaks from structural or plumbing problems are suspected.

## When you receive a complaint



Hear complaint, ask informational questions as indicated.

Information to obtain could be:

**What signs of mold** are present ?

**How long** has issue been present ?

**Are there signs of dampness**, water leaks, or excess humidity?

**What does the complainant think is the source** of dampness, water leaks or humidity?

**If a rental property**, has the landlord/owner been notified, when/how ?

**What steps** have already been taken by renter and by landlord/owner ?

(ex: is an inspection already planned or completed? Any resolution steps taken?)

**Are there** especially vulnerable persons in the home

(ex: children, people with chronic lung disease such as asthma, children, elders) ?

**What is the complainant looking for** from LHO or town; what is next step requested ?



Provide public health education as needed.

Relevant points might include:

- **A mold problem is a *moisture* problem.** First steps will include finding and addressing leaks & moisture issue. If renter, advise landlord/owner if mold and/or active water leaks are present.
- **How to determine if mold is present**, including musty odors, stains, dampness, pest infestations.
- **Individual health responses to mold can vary.** Decision to remove mold is not based on whether residents have symptoms as some people are more sensitive than others. If mold is present, mold and dampness issues will need remediation. The type or color of mold will not determine whether or not remediation is needed.
- **Environmental mold testing is generally not recommended or needed.** There are no set lab standards for “safe levels” of mold, spores can also be missed in sampling; testing results would not change recommendations if other signs of mold are present. (Rarely testing may be recommended if hidden mold is suspected without other signs.)
- **Overview of usual remediation:** depending on size of the mold problem, an owner might be able to address (up to about size of a door) and sometimes a remediation professional will be needed. Fixing any active water leaks or dampness will be first step.
- **How to find a qualified remediation company** if applicable.



# LHO GUIDE: MOLD

## Inspection / complaint verification



### Inspection notes to resident / owner:

- Determine whether a qualified mold remediation company visit / inspection of the location is already planned, either hired by the landlord/owner or resident/renter.
- If you will be doing the initial inspection, let the renter or owner know what to expect during an inspection visit in general terms (including room-to-room walk and inspection of floors, windows, walls, doors, bathroom). Ask that they clear furniture and move items so that you can access walls, windows and floors.
- Let them know that you also recommend that a qualified professional mold remediation company complete a professional inspection to determine extent of remediation needed, if any.
- Let them know you will be taking photos to document the problem.
- Let them know *per routine* you might visit with a municipal colleague, such as the code enforcement officer and/or police officer (if indicated).
- **Obtain consent to enter premises and inspect; note consent in your record.**



### Safety during inspection - considerations

- If possible, do not respond alone. Inspect as a team with a municipal colleague, if possible, a building code expert (ex: CEO). Bring law enforcement if you have any concerns.
- For minor problems, take appropriate precautions to protect yourself from indoor allergens, which can include bringing and potentially wearing an N95 mask and gloves.
- If you discover or suspect that the mold problem is severe, defer to a qualified professional mold remediation company to complete an inspection.
- Bring municipal identification;
- Bring a camera;
- Keep notes (with a checklist if possible) as you inspect.
- **A helpful guide & checklist for your inspection is: [NIOSH Dampness and Mold Assessment Tool](#)**

## Additional Resources

### Public health resources

#### *Consult your District Liaison for assistance*

Selection of mold resources for LHO reference and education for the public can be found on the Maine CDC's online [LHO Resources](#) page and include:

[NIOSH Dampness and Mold Assessment Tool \(pdf, full document\)](#)

[NIOSH Dampness and Mold Assessment Tool \(pdf, printable checklist only\)](#)

[Maine Indoor Air Quality Council: Indoor Air Quality in Rental Properties \(webpage\)](#) and other MIAQC resources

[Mold Testing or Sampling: Is testing for mold necessary? \(EPA\)](#)

### Statutes that might apply

#### *Consult your municipal attorney for assistance*

[Title 14 Section 6021](#) Implied Warranty and Covenant of Habitability

[Title 22 Section 1561](#) Removal of a Private Nuisance

[Title 22 Section 461](#) Notice to owner to clean premises; expenses on refusal

[Title 22 Section 252](#) Penalties

[Title 22 Section 451-A Powers and Duties.](#) Local health officer duties

[Consumer Rights When You Rent an Apartment \(Maine Attorney General's Office\)](#)

Relevant local codes or ordinances

*See Complaint Response – Sample Process (Overview) for more.*

*When responding to a potential public health threat, if you and your municipal colleagues need additional technical support you can reach out to your Maine CDC Public Health District Liaison (find your DL [here](#).)*

