

Indoor Air Quality

Mold

Concern about indoor exposure to mold has been increasing as more people have become aware that exposure to mold can cause a variety of health effects and symptoms, including allergic reactions. The Effingham County Division of Environmental Health does not offer testing or inspections for mold. We do offer educational materials about mold and mold remediation. The following are common questions and answers about mold and mold remediation:

Does the IDPH test for mold?

No. IDPH does not conduct residential mold investigations. IDPH has no role in landlord-tenant disputes. Tenants can be provided with educational information for legal assistance.

Should I have my home or business tested for mold?

IDPH does not advocate sampling for mold. Time and money is better spent fixing the moisture problem and cleaning or replacing water-damaged building materials. If mold is visible there is source of moisture that needs to be eliminated, and the mold needs to be removed and the area cleaned. Even if testing is done, no standards exist to determine acceptable amounts of mold. Testing cannot determine whether adverse health effects will occur.

Who can test for mold?

Usually an industrial hygienist can test for mold. Look for individuals or companies under "Environmental Services" in the Yellow Pages. Also, the American Industrial Hygiene Association provides a list of members at the following website: www.aiha.org. Generally, IDPH does not recommend mold testing.

What are the health effects of mold exposure?

Molds produce allergens, irritants, and sometimes toxins. A person's reaction to mold depends on the level of exposure, their age, and the person's sensitivities to mold. It is different for each individual. Symptoms can include allergic reactions - runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, watery eyes, skin rash. Infectious diseases from mold can occur in people with weakened immune systems. These are opportunistic infections that usually do not affect healthy people.

How can I clean areas of mold in my home or business?

- Eliminate sources of moisture. Mold will return if a moisture problem is not remedied.
- All areas should be thoroughly cleaned with a soap or detergent solution. Disinfect the area after it is completely cleaned. Any porous areas such as carpet or drywall that cannot be thoroughly cleaned should be discarded.
- Avoid sanding areas with mold when possible to reduce dust and debris.

- Debris should be bagged and sealed before removing from the work area. This helps prevent mold from spreading to the rest of the house. Provide continuous ventilation, especially when cleaning agents or disinfectants are used.
- Wear rubber gloves and protective clothing that can be easily cleaned or discarded. In addition, wear a N95 or HEPA filter mask

Are there professionals that perform mold cleanup?

Yellow Pages - "Fire and Water Damage Restoration."

Internet - www.certifiedcleaners.org/index.shtml or www.ascr.org

Does IDPH license individuals to perform mold testing or cleanup?

No. Nor does any other state or federal agency. IDPH cannot recommend the services of any contractor.

I have mold in my apartment and my landlord will not address the situation. Can IDPH help?

No. IDPH cannot enforce codes that define and protect indoor air quality. Persons in incorporated areas should contact their city government, while persons in unincorporated areas should contact their county government.

Where can I find more information about indoor mold and health?

Please refer to the following Illinois Department of Public Health fact sheets:

[Moisture in the Home](#)

[Reducing your Exposure to Mold](#)

[Mold and Your Health](#)

Radon

Radon is a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas in the soil that comes from naturally occurring uranium in the soil. This gas can build up in your home and has been shown to cause lung cancer. Radon can enter your home due to air pressure and temperature differences between inside and outside the home. The only way to know if you have radon in your home is to test for it. Radon test kits may be available at various places such as hardware or home improvement stores or from various agencies. A list of radon measurement professionals and sources of radon test kits and testing can be found on [IEMA's website](#). They do not endorse any company and simply provide the list as a service to the residents of Illinois. IEMA also has [guidelines for measuring radon in the home](#).

Being informed on what radon is, determining your risk of exposure, and how to reduce its levels in your home is another way to help lower your risk for health problems.

For more information about radon, visit the following websites:

[IEMA Radon website](#)

[United States EPA Radon website](#)

[University of Illinois Extension - Take Action on Radon](#)

[SIL Radon Awareness Task Force](#)

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas that has been known to cause illness and death. CO gas is found in fumes produced by such things as automobiles, stoves, burning wood, and heating systems. In enclosed spaces, these fumes will build up and can cause CO poisoning.

Common symptoms of CO poisoning include:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Vomiting
- Chest Pains
- Confusion

All people are at risk of CO poisoning, especially those who may have weakened or underdeveloped immune systems. Many are poisoned accidentally with the most accidental poisonings occurring from December through February due to the reliance of heating with furnaces or warming up cars in a garage.

You can help protect you and your family from carbon monoxide poisoning by following these safety precautions from the CDC:

- DO install battery-operated CO detectors in your home, especially near heating sources. Change the batteries in the detector when you change your clocks from daylight saving time to standard time.
- DO have a qualified technician check your heating systems, water heaters, and other gas-burning, oil-burning, or coal-burning appliances every year.
- DO have your chimney and flue inspected and cleaned yearly.
- DO make sure that your chimney is not blocked with snow before you use your fireplace.
- DO move to a fresh-air location and call 911 immediately if you experience the symptoms of CO poisoning.
- DO check frequently on children and the elderly.

- DO NOT use gas-powered appliances such as ranges, ovens, or clothes dryers to heat your home.
- DO NOT use camp stoves, charcoal grills, or hibachis inside your home, in the basement, or in the garage.
- DO NOT operate a generator inside your home or garage. Only operate a generator outdoors and away from doors, windows, and vents that could allow CO to seep indoors.
- DO NOT run a vehicle inside your garage, even if the garage door is open.

More information regarding carbon monoxide poisoning can be found on [CDC's Carbon Monoxide webpage](#) or [CDC's feature page on carbon monoxide poisoning](#).