



SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

# Mold Fact Sheet



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## WHAT IS MOLD?

Mold is a type of fungus that occurs naturally and thrives in various environments, including on food, plants, and building materials. There are thousands of types of mold spores. While some types of mold, like those used in cheese and penicillin, are useful, others can cause allergic reactions or irritation in sensitive individuals. Molds reproduce by creating microscopic cells known as spores, which can become airborne.

## WHERE IS MOLD FOUND?

Mold spores are ubiquitous and can be found both outdoors and indoors, easily traveling through the air. An indoor mold problem is generally defined as a situation where mold concentrations are significantly higher inside than outside. Updated information about naturally occurring outdoor mold trends in our area is available on many public websites. (Ex. [austinpollen.com](http://austinpollen.com))

## WHAT CAUSES INDOOR MOLD GROWTH?

Mold can grow inside a building when certain conditions are met, including a food source, measurable moisture (relative humidity), and a warm temperature.

- ▶ **Food sources:** Mold can feed on many organic materials common in buildings, such as dust, paper, wood, fabric, and certain paints.
- ▶ **Moisture:** Water damage from events like floods, pipe or roof leaks, and high indoor humidity are common causes of the damp conditions that promote mold growth. Poorly designed or operated heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems can also contribute.
- ▶ **Temperature:** A temperature of 75°F or higher, combined with relative humidity of 60% or more, creates an ideal environment for common indoor mold.
- ▶ **Light and air flow:** A food source with adequate moisture in a dark space with little or no air movement creates the ideal conditions for mold growth.

## HOW IS UNHEALTHY MOLD GROWTH DETECTED?

A musty odor or visible mold growth may indicate a problem situation. It is important to note that allergy-related symptoms alone do not indicate an indoor mold problem as many variables can cause similar symptoms. At-home test kits are not recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or Texas Department of State Health Services for accurate indoor air quality assessment.



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## WHAT IS A MOLD ASSESSMENT?

A mold assessment is an inspection of a building area to determine if mold is present and, if so, to what extent. At Southwestern University, mold assessments are performed according to the Facilities Management Department's Indoor Air Quality Protocol, which may include inspection by the environmental health and safety (EHS) division and environmental readings using specialized equipment. Sampling may be conducted to identify the type and amount of mold, though it is not always required. All assessment activity at SU follows guidelines established by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation.

## WHAT IS MOLD REMEDIATION?

Mold remediation is the process of cleaning and removing mold growth from surfaces and contents within a building. It also involves taking actions to prevent future mold growth. All remediation activity at SU follows guidelines established by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

You can contribute to preventing mold and improving air quality in your building by taking these simple steps:

- ▶ Maintain indoor humidity below 60%. Do not open windows in a centrally-controlled building and do not use room humidifiers.
- ▶ Report any water leaks immediately.
- ▶ Ensure trash is disposed of regularly.
- ▶ Store food properly to avoid attracting pests and creating potential food sources for mold.
- ▶ Do not deliberately grow mold cultures outside a lab environment.