**FAQ’s About Mold**

**What causes mold to grow?**

Mold is a part of the natural environment that aids in the decomposition of leaves, trees, and other natural outdoor organic materials. Individual mold spores are invisible to the human eye and are continually floating around outside in nature. However, when those spores make their way into the indoors and are exposed to wet/humid areas they can begin to grow or colonize. It is impossible to eliminate mold and mold spores in the indoor environment due to outdoor to indoor movements of daily human activity being carried in on clothing, shoes, and backpacks.

Mold is found almost everywhere and can grow on wood, paper, carpet, foods, insulation, ceiling tiles, clothing, and painted walls if moisture, a food source, and oxygen are present. Mold needs water/moisture to grow, therefore maintaining indoor moisture and humidity levels between 30-60 percent will reduce the likelihood of indoor mold growth. Controlling humidity in large, heavily populated buildings is difficult, especially in hot humid weather.

**Where is mold and mildew found?**

Molds come in a variety of colors, including white, which is sometimes seen on a damp carpet; pink, which is often found on shower walls not cleaned regularly; and darkly pigmented, which is often seen around windowsills because of condensation. Given a source of moisture, mold can grow just about anywhere. Moisture control, air circulation and good housekeeping practices are necessary to control mold growth. The color of the mold does not mean the mold is harmful such as the term “black mold”.

**How does mold spread?**

Air circulation in a building varies throughout the day and depends on the level of activity in that space. Mold spores are always present in both the indoor and outdoor environment and can be carried in on clothing, backpacks, shoes, etc.

**Are there state or national regulations regarding mold?**

Though specific regulations have not been developed for IAQ in the workplace, Occupational and Environmental Safety Department (OES) considers recommendations for investigations from the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH), American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA), ASHRAE, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). when addressing IAQ concerns. Mold is a natural byproduct of various conditions, often occurring in warm and moist environments where there is abundant vegetation such as trees, landscaping plants, and ground coverings. According to the EPA, mold cannot be eliminated in the environment unless extreme measures are taken constantly, as would be the case in a “clean room” laboratory.

**Why not conduct mold testing?**

Mold testing is not recommended in many cases. Instead, careful detailed visual inspection and recognition of moldy odors should be used to find problems needing correction. Efforts should focus on areas where there are signs of moisture or water vapor (humidity) or where moisture problems are suspected. The investigation goals should be to locate indoor mold growth to determine how to correct the moisture problem and remove contamination safely and effectively.

**Should I purchase a Home Mold Kit to test my room?**

No, mold home test kits are not accurate since mold is present both inside and outside. Mold plates are designed to grow mold spores and since there are mold spores in the air everywhere all the time, you should expect to get mold spores growing on the plates wherever you place it. This is not indicative of poor indoor air quality.

**Should I purchase a portable air cleaner and dehumidifier?**

University Facilities will take appropriate actions including the installation of temporary dehumidifiers in student rooms if excessive humidity becomes an issue.

**If mold were to be found in my residence hall, would it be safe for me to continue to occupy my space?**

In most cases, the answer is yes. According to federal health and safety agencies, mold is commonly found in both indoor and outdoor environments. Therefore, varying levels of mold is always all around us. In rare cases with extensive water intrusion and substantial mold growth, students may be moved to another room until remediation and repair is completed. Individuals may also be moved that may have allergies to a specific mold.

**How does mold affect people?**

Mold affects people differently. Most people may have no reaction when exposed to mold. Some may experience hay fever-type symptoms, while others may experience more significant symptoms. Some people are sensitive to mold and may experience short-term or acute reactions in the presence of mold growth. Symptoms associated with mold exposure are not unique and cannot be readily distinguished from symptoms caused by other medical conditions, such as the common cold or seasonal environmental allergies. We recommend that you visit CU Redfern Health Services or your health care provider if you experience any health concerns.

**Is mold an allergen?**

Mold produces allergens, but like any other allergen, exposed individuals will respond differently. Some may have no reaction; others may experience hay fever-type symptoms and others may experience more significant symptoms. It is important to keep in mind that many students new to South Carolina will experience seasonal allergy symptoms, even without a prior history of this condition. Symptoms typically will arise during the first or second year at Clemson University. Having never experienced problems with seasonal allergies, many students may attribute these symptoms to a sinus infection or become concerned that there is mold in their residence hall.

**What is the inspection process to determine how to address any mold in my residence?**

A qualified team of staff members from University Facilities Maintenance and Occupational and Environmental Safety (OES) responds to work orders. Staff will knock, enter, and conduct a thorough visual inspection of furniture, wall, closets, and fan coil units to check for any evidence of mold growth or other concerns, as well as take readings for temperature and humidity, and if indicated for dust, total volatile organic chemicals (VOC), and carbon dioxide. Moisture readings may also be taken for suspected wet building materials. The HVAC system will be evaluated to make sure the system is operating properly.

**What will be done if there is mold found in my room?**

Measures will be taken to thoroughly clean and dry the area affected. This work may be completed by University Facilities Custodial staff and/or an outside contractor specializing in water cleanup and restoration. If necessary, dehumidifiers, fans and/or air purifiers will be placed in the living space and will need to remain operational until they are removed to enhance the drying process to prevent future mold growth. Staff will return to check regularly on the progress until the situation has been resolved and may instruct residents in ways to assist in that process. In some cases, students may be relocated on campus to an open room for a few days to allow for proper remediation. Due to the unique circumstances around each situation, cases are managed independently with communication managed by the Residential Living.

**Does Clemson Home conduct proactive inspections for mold?**

Mold inspections within occupied spaces during the academic school year are only conducted at the request of a work order. Proactive inspections occur regularly throughout the year to include focusing on common areas in conjunction with the fire and life safety inspections. Comprehensive building inspections during the summer between conferences also occur each year.

**If I see little dark spots or splotches on a windowsill, sash, or frame or on a pipe or other surface, is that mold?**

Maybe. Mold spores are always floating in the air and will grow when they have the right amount of moisture. Condensation around windows or on pipe insulation, for example, can allow certain types of fungus to grow. What you see could also just be dirt, dust, and particulates that settle and collect on those surfaces.

**If those spots are mold, are they dangerous?**

Almost certainly not. We all breathe and touch many types of microscopic mold spores every day and the great majority of people have no reactions. Some people who have chronic respiratory issues, such as asthma, or who are already sick or what is called immuno-compromised, may have reactions to certain types of mold.

**What should a student do to report mold?**

For temperature, odor or smell complaints, suspected water leaks or visible mold, report concern to Facilities through the work order system either by calling 656-5450 or putting in a work order online. Facilities will respond within 24 hours of notification and refer the complaint to OES when needed if visible mold or other assistance is needed.

**What might contribute to indoor mold growth, such as that found in some locations on campus?**

Indoor sources for mold may be leaking pipes, windows, or roof, standing water, damp clothing or towels and condensation in the area. Clemson University is equally concerned about finding the source of the mold and cleaning it. If mold can be prevented by taking certain steps, Clemson University does so.

**What are some recommendations the University has made to students to reduce the likelihood of mold growth in their living area?**

Remember The 3 C’s

**1. Cleaning**

* Cleanliness in your space can assist in improving IAQ and promoting a living environment free of mold, pests, and insects.
* Hang damp or wet towels, bathmats, clothing, or other items immediately and allow drying completely. Do not place wet items on wooden furniture or closets.
* Wipe down vents and dust your room regularly.
* Do not allow mildew to accumulate in your baths and shower stalls.
* Cleaning of community bathrooms is the responsibility of University Facilities Custodial Services. Report any mold or mildew immediately to your RA, Housing staff members or by submitting a work order to Facilities.

**2. Climate**

* KEEP WINDOWS CLOSED when air conditioning is on
* Follow Facilities guidance for proper temperature setting in your space, do not tamper with the HVAC unit (including changing fan from AUTO to ON or reprogramming the equipment to operate outside designed parameters).
* Use the exhaust fans in bathrooms to remove the moisture created by bathing. Use bathmats to absorb water after showering or bathing.

1. **Communication**

* Communicate any leaks or water intrusion to CU Facilities immediately.

**Where can I find out more about the CU Indoor Air quality Program**

Visit the CU OES Webpage at: [Indoor Air Quality | Clemson University, South Carolina](https://www.clemson.edu/research/oes/ihsafety/indoorairqualiy.html)