



# NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MOLD AWARENESS AND PREVENTION GUIDE

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## Abstract

The NDSU Mold Awareness and Prevention Guide serves as a resource for students, faculty, and staff to provide clear information on mold, moisture control, and indoor environmental conditions that may contribute to mold growth. The goal of this guide is to support a healthy living and learning environment by promoting awareness, early reporting, and effective response to moisture-related issues on campus.

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## I. MOLD AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Mold is a natural part of the environment and mold spores are present everywhere—indoors and outdoors. Mold becomes a concern primarily when moisture is present for a prolonged time, which allows spores to grow on indoor surfaces. Most NDSU campus spaces do not support mold growth unless there is a moisture source. Since mold is everywhere, controlling moisture is the most effective way to minimize the potential for mold growth inside NDSU buildings.

Students, employees, and campus visitors may occasionally notice discoloration, odors, or dampness and report concerns. The NDSU Safety Office takes all reports seriously and follows a consistent investigation process to ensure safe, healthy spaces across campus.

This guide explains:

- What mold is and how it grows;
- How to recognize potential mold or moisture issues;
- Steps to help prevent mold;
- NDSU's investigation and response process; and
- When and how to report a concern.

### A. WHAT IS MOLD?

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Mold is a type of fungus that grows in areas where moisture is present.

Key facts:

- Microscopic spores are always in the air—indoors and outdoors.
- Mold needs **moisture, a food source, and time** to grow.
- Food sources include drywall, wood, carpets, dust, paper, and organic materials.
- Mold comes in many colors (black, green, white, brown, gray). Color alone does not indicate toxicity.

Mold growth most often appears in warm, humid, or wet indoor areas, including bathrooms, basements, and surfaces with condensation or water damage. Mold found in a building should be removed, using proper clean-up techniques, as soon as practical to lessen the health effects on building occupants.

### B. HOW MOLD AFFECTS PEOPLE

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Most people experience mild or no symptoms from incidental mold exposure. Some individuals are more sensitive to mold and may experience short-term reactions when exposed to it. Because symptoms of mold exposure often resemble those of other conditions—like colds or seasonal allergies—it can be difficult to tell the difference. If you have any health concerns, we recommend consulting your healthcare provider.

Some individuals may be more sensitive and experience:

- Nasal or sinus congestion
- Throat irritation
- Coughing or wheezing
- Eye irritation
- Skin irritation

## C. HOW TO RECOGNIZE POSSIBLE MOLD GROWTH

Mold needs three basic conditions to develop: moisture, a food source/surface to grow on, and time to grow. Controlling moisture is the most effective way to eliminate mold.

Common signs of mold or moisture problems include:

- Visible spots, patches, or streaks on walls, ceilings, floors, window sills, or furniture
- Musty, earthy, or “old basement” odors
- Water stains, bubbling paint, peeling drywall
- Excessive condensation on windows or cold surfaces
- Persistent dampness or humidity
- Evidence of active or past leaks

If any of these conditions are present, report the concern to the NDSU Safety Office. Sometimes stains, dust, or residue are mistaken for mold. NDSU investigates each concern to determine whether mold is present, and if conditions exist to support mold growth.

Type Of Mold	Common Places Found	Images
<b>Indoor Mold</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm, humid environments.</li> <li>• Bathrooms, garages, basements.</li> <li>• Areas with poor ventilation.</li> <li>• On surfaces like cardboard, walls, wood and building materials.</li> </ul>	 <p>Mold on carpet.</p>



Mold on walls.

## D. PREVENTING MOLD IN CAMPUS SPACES

NDSU emphasizes moisture control as the most effective prevention strategy.

To reduce mold risk:

### **Keep areas clean and dry**

- Hang up wet towels or clothing.
- Wipe spills promptly.
- Do not leave damp materials piled or closed inside closets.
- Remove trash regularly, especially food waste

### **Promote good ventilation**

- Use bathroom exhaust fans when showering or bathing.
- Don't block vents with furniture or boxes.
- Allow air circulation around exterior walls.

### **Avoid moisture buildup**

- Report all leaks immediately (plumbing, window, roof, HVAC).
- Address condensation issues early.
- Avoid storing items directly on floors in damp areas.

### **Control humidity**

- Try to maintain indoor humidity between 30 and 50%.
- Allow airflow around moisture-generating appliances.

## E. WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT MOLD

If you see or smell something concerning:

1. Complete the Mold Concern Form — provide as much detail as possible.

2. Students and employees should not attempt to clean or disturb suspected mold growth themselves. Only trained personnel may perform mold remediation.
3. If you are in a residence hall or campus housing, contact Residence Life and inform them of your concern.
4. If you are an employee, notify your supervisor of the concern.
5. If the situation is urgent (active leak, flooding, strong musty odors), call:
  - o NDSU Safety Office: 701-231-7759;
  - o Residence Life; or
  - o Facilities Management as appropriate.

## F. HOW NDSU INVESTIGATES MOLD CONCERNS

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When a report is submitted, the NDSU Safety Office begins a structured evaluation:

### 1. Initial Assessment

- Check for visible mold, moisture, staining, odors, or ventilation issues.
- Interview occupants to understand history of the concern and room.
- Review housekeeping and occupancy conditions.

### 2. Moisture & Environmental Measurements

- Use moisture meters on walls, ceilings, or flooring.
- Measure relative humidity and temperature.
- Assess ventilation and airflow patterns.

### 3. Air Quality Monitoring (when appropriate)

- Continuous indoor air monitoring may be deployed to understand room conditions over time.

### 4. Identify Source

- NDSU works with Facilities Management to determine and correct the moisture source:
  - o Plumbing leaks
  - o Roof or window leaks
  - o HVAC condensation
  - o Floods or spills

### 5. Remediation (may include):

- Clean and dry affected materials.
- Remove damaged materials if necessary.
- Install dehumidifiers or fans until fully dry.

### 6. Communication & Follow-Up

- The Safety Office informs the reporter of findings and any required follow-up actions.
- Cases are closed only after moisture control is confirmed.

## G. WHY MOLD TESTING IS NOT USUALLY RECOMMENDED

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NDSU follows evidence-based guidance from the CDC and EPA; air sampling for mold is generally not useful.

Reasons include:

- Mold spores are present everywhere, and sampling will always detect them.
- There are no federal or state exposure limits for mold.
- Airborne levels fluctuate significantly throughout the day.
- Moisture—not spore counts—is the key driver of mold growth.

At-home mold test kits are fraught with limitations and often lead to unnecessary concern. These kits typically collect and encourage whatever mold spores happen to settle from the air to grow—spores that are naturally present in all indoor and outdoor environments. They also lack necessary reference controls, consistent sampling protocols, and lab analysis. Because there are no established “safe” or “unsafe” indoor mold spore levels, a positive result does not indicate a mold problem or a health risk. Without evaluating moisture conditions, visible growth elsewhere, or building history, these tests can be misleading and are not a reliable way to assess indoor mold concerns.

Therefore, NDSU bases investigations on visual assessment, moisture measurements, humidity, and environmental factors. The best approach is to monitor moisture conditions, visible signs, odors, and overall indoor environment—that’s what the Safety Office uses when evaluating a concern. Testing may be recommended if there is no visible mold but indicators suggest hidden mold growth (humidity, moisture, or odors).

## H. WHAT HAPPENS IF MOLD IS FOUND?

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If mold is confirmed:

1. Moisture source is identified and repaired.
2. Affected areas are cleaned using appropriate methods (cleaning agents, HEPA filtration, drying equipment).
3. Damaged material may be removed (drywall, carpet, insulation).
4. Fans / dehumidifiers remain in place until fully dry.
5. Follow-up inspection ensures the space is safe before returning occupants.

## I. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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### NDSU Students & Employees

- Keep areas clean and dry.

- Report leaks or mold concerns promptly.
- Follow recommendations provided by Residence Life or the Safety Office.

#### **Residence Life & Facilities Management**

- Respond to leaks, water intrusion, and moisture issues.
- Clean and remediate mold-affected areas.
- Coordinate contractor involvement when needed.

#### **NDSU Safety Office**

- Manage mold concern evaluations.
- Conduct initial and follow-up investigations.
- Provide education and communication to building occupants.
- Coordinate with Facilities Management on corrective actions.

### **J. WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE**

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Anyone experiencing health symptoms they believe are related to their environment should contact:

- Student Health Service (students)
- Occupational Health or personal healthcare provider (employees)

The Safety Office evaluates environmental factors but cannot diagnose medical conditions.

### **II. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- [Mold Clean Up Guidelines and Recommendations \(CDC\)](#)
- [EPA's Mold Web Page](#)
- [Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings \(EPA\)](#)
- [North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality Mold Web Page](#)
- [NDSU Mold Web Page](#)