

Did you know? There are as many as 300,000 species of mold fungi.

While you might associate molds with warm, dark and wet conditions, here's the dew: Mold spreads and reproduces by making spores, and those spores can survive harsh dry and cold conditions. Even if you think environmental conditions killed your mold problem—they probably didn't.

Aside from the allergic reactions they can cause—some severe—over time, mold can do real damage to your home, attacking wallpaper, wood, drywall, carpeting and interior furnishings. Look for these signs that your home is at risk from mold: moisture condensation on windows, plasterboard that cracks or drywall tape that buckles, warping floors or a musty odor.

Lessen your risk of mold

You can decrease your exposure to mold, according to both Centers for Disease Control and Environmental Protection Agency guidelines, by ventilating bathing and cooking areas to keep humidity levels between 40 and 60 percent.

If you do find mold, you can remove it from hard surfaces with soap and water or a bleach solution of one cup of bleach in one gallon of water. However, if you use bleach to clean up household mold, never mix it with ammonia or other household cleaners; open windows and doors for fresh air; and wear overalls, gloves and protective eyewear—and consider a respirator.

Hiring professional help

Most cities have many mold remediation contractors who will do the job for you. But keep in mind a few considerations when hiring them. King suggests asking for references, shopping around for estimates, confirming their licensing and insurance, getting a warranty or guarantee on services, and importantly, looking for certification by a bona fide organization such as the Indoor Air Quality Association, the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning & Restoration or OSHA. Of course, you should always check any potential contractor with the Better Business Bureau in your area for consumer complaints.