

Home Moisture & Mold Decision Chart

Find the moisture pattern before you clean the surface.

STOP FIRST

Active flooding, sewage, unsafe electricity, gas odor, a soft or sagging ceiling, or structural damage

Leave the affected area, avoid disturbing damaged material, and contact the appropriate emergency, repair, landlord, or restoration service.

1 Match the moisture pattern

Timing and location are clues - not a remote diagnosis.

1 CONDENSATION / HUMIDITY

WHAT POINTS HERE

Wet windows or cold walls after showers, cooking, or overnight; several surfaces are affected.

FIRST MOVE

Dry the surface. Measure room humidity. Use working exhaust ventilation or a dehumidifier as appropriate. EPA: below 60%, ideally 30%-50% RH.

2 PLUMBING / APPLIANCE LEAK

WHAT POINTS HERE

Localized wetness near a fixture, supply line, drain, water heater, dishwasher, washer, or refrigerator.

FIRST MOVE

Stop using the source if needed. Shut off water only if safe. Repair the leak, remove standing water, and dry wet materials within 24-48 hours when possible.

3 RAIN / EXTERIOR ENTRY

WHAT POINTS HERE

A stain or damp area appears after rain near a roof, window, door, wall, basement, or foundation.

FIRST MOVE

Treat it as a building-water problem. Document the timing, correct the entry point, and assess damaged material before repainting or caulking.

4 MUSTY ODOR / HIDDEN SOURCE

WHAT POINTS HERE

A persistent musty smell, repeated growth, or dampness is present but the source is not visible.

FIRST MOVE

Inspect visually for leaks and moisture. Routine air sampling is usually not the first step. Get qualified help when the odor or moisture persists.

2 After the water source is controlled, choose the cleanup route

LIMITED DIY

A small, cleanable surface may be a DIY job

Use this route only when the visible area is smaller than about 10 sq ft, the material is firm and cleanable, and there is no sewage, floodwater, HVAC contamination, or health concern. Wear gloves, eye protection, and an N95. Clean hard surfaces with detergent and water; dry completely.

ESCALATE

Stop and arrange qualified help

Use professional, landlord, or building-management help for more than about 10 sq ft, many scattered patches, recurring growth, soft or damaged porous material, contaminated water, suspected HVAC involvement, hidden structural moisture, or health circumstances that make exposure a concern.

Never mix cleaning products. Do not paint or caulk over active mold or unresolved water damage.

PRIMARY SOURCES

U.S. EPA - A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture and Your Home: [epa.gov/mold/brief-guide-mold-moisture-and-your-home](https://www.epa.gov/mold/brief-guide-mold-moisture-and-your-home)

CDC/NIOSH - Mold, Testing, and Remediation: [cdc.gov/niosh/mold/testing-remediation](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/mold/testing-remediation)

CDC - 8 Tips to Clean Up Mold: [cdc.gov/natural-disasters/psa-toolkit/8-tips-to-cleanup-mold.html](https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/psa-toolkit/8-tips-to-cleanup-mold.html)

Educational triage only - not a mold, structural, medical, or indoor-air diagnosis.

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