

## Mold Can Be Main Cause Of Illnesses *by Maggie Stehr, Bismarck Tribune*

Holly Wald was tired of running her family to the doctor with runny noses and other tell-tale signs of mold-related illness.

When the Walds remodeled their basement four years ago, they found cement walls spotted with black mold. Spongy mildew grew along window frames, and moisture buildup dampened the glass, the Edgeley resident said.

Years of heavy rainstorms had overworked their sump pump, Wald said. But since replacing the floor, some of the walls and windows, she said her family's health has improved.

"You go to the doctor thinking you have a cold, and you don't realize that it's the mold in your house," she said.

And as cleanup continues from last week's flash flooding, residents of flooded homes and businesses risk developing mold-related illness, said Sandi Washek, a North Dakota Department of Health environmental scientist.

At least one Edgeley man went to the hospital after hours of mopping up flood waters, Wald said.

Moist, fibrous materials and stagnant water provide the ideal climate for mold growth, Washek said. Molds can infiltrate Sheetrock, carpeting and insulation.

Sewage and chemicals that often contaminate groundwater both pose a risk to flood victims and speed growth, Washek said.

Washek recommends using a nonammonia soap or detergent and hot water, or commercial cleaner, to thoroughly scrub moldy areas.

After rinsing, surfaces should dry at least three weeks to three months to prevent regrowth.

Washek also advised using personal protection, such as masks, gloves and eyewear, turning off electricity and ventilating when cleaning moldy areas.

People's reaction to mold varies, but allergy and flu-like symptoms are common with long exposure, she said.

People with asthma or pulmonary problems, or those allergic to mold, are most vulnerable to severe illness, she said.

But patience, Washek said, is often the biggest problem to preventing mold-related illness.

"After a flood, people want to remodel right away," she said. "They never let their basement dry out."

Moisture trapped behind new drywall is especially susceptible to mold, she said.

Another common mistake is failing to replace wet carpet, Washek said. Both carpet and the underlying pad should be removed following a flood -- along with all other wet property, she said.

"When you clean your carpet, the surface may look clean and neat, but a week later it will start to smell," she said.

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