What You Should Know About Mold

What are the Causes of Mold?
Molds are fungi and are part of the natural environment, they can be found anywhere – inside or outside – throughout the year. About 1,000 species of mold can be found in the United States, with more than 100,000 known species worldwide. Outdoors, molds play an important role in nature by breaking down organic matter. Indoors, mold growth should be avoided. Problems may arise when mold starts eating away at structural materials and personal possessions, affecting the look, the smell, and possibly affecting the structural integrity of wood framed buildings and homes.

Molds can grow on virtually any substance, as long as three elements are present—moisture or water, oxygen, and an organic source. Molds reproduce by creating tiny spores—viable seeds, visible only through magnification—that float through our indoor and outdoor air. When these spores land on a damp spot and begin to grow they digest whatever organic matter they land on to survive. When moisture or water leaks go unchecked, molds will grow on wood, paper, carpet, walls and insulation, feasting on everyday dust and dirt that gather in moist areas. All molds share the characterist of growing without sunlight, this explains why mold infestation is often found in damp, dark, hidden spaces like under carpets and behind walls. Light and air circulation allow moisture to dry-up making those areas less hospitable for mold.

Disaster Recovery – What are my risks and how can I protect myself?
Flood conditions contribute to the growth and transmission of many kinds of fungi (mold), some of which can cause sickness. Cleanup workers are at an increased risk of exposure to airborne fungi and their spores because workers often handle moldy building materials, decaying vegetable matter, rotting waste material, and other fungus–contaminated debris during clean-up. One particularly toxic type of mold is Stachybotrys chartarum, a greenish–black mold that grows on materials with high cellulose content (drywall, wood, paper, ceiling tiles) that are chronically wet or moist. Stachybotrys is one of several molds that can produce mycotoxins—the effects of which are not completely understood, but which are known to cause some health risks.
Without wearing the proper respiratory protection a worker inhales the fungal material—or spores, into the respiratory tract via airborne dust particles. There are many different kinds of fungi, including mildew, molds, rusts, and yeasts. Most of these are harmless, but some can cause respiratory issues, including allergies, asthma, infection or toxic effects when workers inhale or come into contact with fungi.

Inhalation is the route of exposure of most concern to flood cleanup workers—respiratory protection for workers in cleanup areas is vital to health. Minimally, workers should protect themselves by wearing an N95 disposable mask—for more severe areas a half-mask respirator with P100 filters and for areas with high mold and fumes from clean-up chemicals, a full facepiece with organic vapor cartridge and P100 filter. For better understanding of your personal protection needs, a Safety Expert should be consulted.

For more information on key considerations and protection options during disaster clean-up, refer to the “Personal Protective Equipment for Mold Remediation” document on honeywellsafety.com/moldremediation.