



HOMEOWNER & CLIENT GUIDE

MOLD PREVENTION TIPS

Mold needs three things: spores, an organic surface, and moisture. Spores are everywhere, and drywall, wood, and dust are food. **Moisture is the only variable you control** — so every mold problem is really a water problem, and every fix starts by finding the water.

WHY NORTHERN MICHIGAN HOMES ARE PRONE TO IT

We surround houses with water, then ask them to survive extreme temperature swings. Lake-effect humidity, long heating seasons that seal a home tight, ice dams pushing water into wall cavities, unconditioned crawl spaces over damp soil, and cottages that sit closed for months are all standing invitations for growth.

01 CONTROL HUMIDITY FIRST

- ☐ **Keep indoor relative humidity between 30% and 50%.** Above 60% sustained, mold will grow on ordinary dust.
- ☐ **Put a hygrometer in the basement and crawl space** — the cheapest diagnostic tool in the house.
- ☐ **Run a dehumidifier in the basement** from spring through fall, plumbed to a drain so nobody has to empty it.
- ☐ **Lower humidity to 30–40% in winter** to stop condensation on cold windows and exterior walls.
- ☐ **Don't air out the basement on humid days.** Warm, wet air condensing on cool masonry makes the problem worse.
- ☐ **Run bath fans during and 20 minutes after every shower,** and confirm they vent outdoors.
- ☐ **Use the kitchen range hood** when cooking or boiling.
- ☐ **Vent the clothes dryer outside,** never into a basement or crawl space.

02 KEEP WATER OUT OF THE BUILDING

- ☐ **Slope grade away from the foundation** and extend downspouts 4–6 feet.
- ☐ **Keep gutters clean** so meltwater doesn't back up under the eaves.
- ☐ **Prevent ice dams** with attic air sealing, insulation, and ventilation. Dam water enters hidden wall cavities.
- ☐ **Repair roof and flashing leaks immediately** — a slow leak into insulation can grow mold for years unseen.
- ☐ **Maintain the sump pump and its backup.**
- ☐ **Fix plumbing drips at once,** including the quiet ones under sinks and behind toilets.
- ☐ **Cover crawl space soil** with a sealed 6-mil vapor barrier. Bare dirt releases gallons of water into the house.
- ☐ **Insulate cold-water pipes and ducts** that sweat in summer.

THE 48-HOUR RULE

Mold can begin colonizing wet material within 24 to 48 hours. After any leak, flood, or ice-dam event, the goal is to get everything dry inside two days — extract water, pull wet carpet pad, open cavities, and run fans and a dehumidifier. Material dried fast usually doesn't need remediation. Material left wet a week almost always does.

03 WHERE WE ACTUALLY FIND IT

LOCATION	WHAT'S USUALLY DRIVING IT	WHAT TO DO
Basement walls and corners	High humidity on cool masonry, or seepage from poor drainage	Dehumidify, then fix grade and downspouts
Crawl spaces	Bare soil, standing water, or a missing vapor barrier	Seal the ground, dry the space, correct drainage
Attic sheathing	Bath or dryer fans dumping into the attic; blocked soffits	Re-route vents outdoors, restore ventilation
Around windows	Winter condensation on cold glass, or failed caulk	Lower indoor humidity, re-seal, add storm windows
Behind bathroom walls	Failed grout or caulk letting water into the cavity	Re-seal; open the wall if staining shows
Under sinks and behind appliances	Slow supply or drain leaks nobody noticed	Repair, dry fully, replace damaged cabinet base
Closed-up cottages	Months of summer humidity with no conditioning	Run a dehumidifier or minimal AC; check monthly

04 SEASONAL & VACANT PROPERTIES

- ☐ **Never close a house up completely for the summer.** A sealed, unconditioned building in July is a mold incubator.
- ☐ **Leave a dehumidifier running** on a drain line, or set AC to a modest hold.
- ☐ **Leave interior doors open** and pull furniture off exterior walls so air can move.
- ☐ **Arrange monthly in-person checks.** Most cottage mold is found in May, having grown since October.
- ☐ **Install a humidity and leak sensor** that reports to your phone.
- ☐ **Shut off the water at the main** when nobody is there.

05 CLEANING UP — AND WHEN TO STOP

- **Under about 10 square feet** on a hard, non-porous surface is generally a homeowner job.
- **Use detergent and water, then dry thoroughly.** Scrubbing without fixing the moisture just resets the clock.
- **Skip the bleach on porous materials.** It doesn't reach hyphae in wood or drywall and adds water.
- **Discard porous material that stayed wet** — carpet pad, ceiling tile, saturated drywall and insulation.
- **Call a professional for larger areas**, for any HVAC contamination, or after sewage or flood water.
- **Never paint or seal over mold.** It hides the evidence and keeps growing underneath.
- **Wear an N95, gloves, and eye protection** for any disturbance, and contain the work area.
- **Anyone with asthma or a compromised immune system** should stay out of the work area entirely.

06 TARGET HUMIDITY REFERENCE

SPACE / SEASON	TARGET RH	WHY IT MATTERS UP HERE
Living space, summer	40–50%	Lake humidity pushes indoor levels past 60% without dehumidification
Living space, winter	30–40%	Higher than this condenses on cold glass, sills, and exterior walls
Basement, year-round	Under 55%	Cool masonry plus humid air is our most common growth condition
Crawl space	Under 60%	Requires a sealed vapor barrier over soil to hold
Vacant / seasonal	Under 60%	Needs a dehumidifier on a drain, not an occasional visit
Any space, sustained	Over 60%	Growth becomes likely on dust and organic surfaces — act now

FOR AGENTS: WHAT MOLD DOES AND DOESN'T MEAN IN A TRANSACTION

Visible growth is common in basements and crawl spaces here and is usually fixable once the water source is corrected. What matters is scope and cause: a humidity problem and a chronic foundation leak look alike on a wall but differ by an order of magnitude in cost. Identify the source before anyone negotiates a number.

MUSTY SMELL, PAST LEAK, OR VISIBLE GROWTH? GET IT IDENTIFIED.

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