

## Breaking the mould

Not all mould is harmful, but there is no 'safe' level to have in your home



Linda sent me an email about a problem she's got with white mould growing on her basement floor. She's used soap and water on it and it came back. She used bleach and it came back. She's called experts and they suggest she needs to dig around her house and replace the weeping tile. She wonders if maybe she can just paint her basement floor and get rid of the problem.

I've got to say that mould, or even the possibility of mould, scares everybody lately. We've got to use some common sense and not over-react.

If you go on the Internet it's really easy to scare yourself. If you believe everything you read, you have to hire a certified mould inspector and have a full mould remediation for every suspected mould sighting. Suddenly a lot of people are calling themselves "mould remediation experts." A few years ago, that industry didn't exist —and now, there are lots of "experts," some of who've only been around for a few years.

There's a lot of fear around mould, and that makes people willing to pay "experts" for advice. Be sure you check the credentials of anyone you are calling in to offer you advice on your mould. What is their training? What kind of professional accreditation do they have? Do they have references? Check them out! Mould remediation is a new industry, and like with anything new, it's the frontier — it's the Wild West.

First of all, don't panic. Mould spores are everywhere — and not all mould is toxic. Mould needs basic requirements to be present for it to live — food, moisture and the right temperature. It needs an organic food source — like drywall, wood, paper or carpet — the kind of material

you've got in a finished basement.

Mould doesn't grow on concrete. The white stuff Linda's got growing on her concrete floor is most probably efflorescence — residual mineral salts that are left behind when water evaporates.

Concrete is porous, and it will wick any moisture through it. So, if there's water on the other side of the floor or wall it will make its way into the concrete and eventually come out the other side. If you look closely at the "white stuff," you'll see it's a crystal, and it feels like a fine dried chalk powder if you rub it between your fingers. It will dissolve if you put it into water — mould won't do that.

But if you do have efflorescence on your floors or walls, it means there is moisture present. And, that means conditions are right for mould to grow in your basement. So, before you give it a food source by finishing the space and putting down carpet or drywall, make sure you seal it properly and deal with the water problem. I'm not sure that you will need to excavate all around the house and replace all the weeping tile — that might be going overboard. But, at the very least call in a contractor who's experienced with foundations and basements and see what the water source might be.

I'm not a fan of painting concrete in basements. It won't stop the moisture seeping through, and the paint will lift and peel in a very short time. There are special basement sealers and paints that are marketed to do this job — some are better than others. But, in my opinion, you should stop the water at the source and not mask it; that's just a band aid solution.

Every home has mould. But not every home has a mould problem. And only a small percentage of mould is "toxic." But, a lot of people are sensitive to mould spores — they trigger allergy and asthma symptoms when inhaled and can affect health. There's no real standard for a mould level that is "OK" or "safe" — every individual is different in how they react to mould in the air.

If you do have a small amount of mould, you should clean it; strong soap or detergent and water is fine, bleach is not a good idea. Get to it before it grows bigger. Wear a mask and gloves. Keep the area well ventilated. If there's a lot of mould, or if it comes back, that's when you need to call in a professional. And make sure you check them out.

*Catch Mike in his new series, [Holmes Inspection](#), airing Thursdays at 8 p.m. ET/PT on HGTV. For more information, visit [www.hgtv.ca](http://www.hgtv.ca).*

*For more information on home renovations, visit [makeitright.ca](http://makeitright.ca).*

© Copyright (c) Postmedia News