

Mold problems

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Learn what Washington State law says about landlords' and tenants' duties to prevent and clean up mold and what options renters have if their rental unit has mold problems.

Mold is a common problem in many rental units in Washington State and can cause serious health problems. While some people have physical reactions to mold (such as respiratory problems) that make them feel sick, others do not.

Washington's Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RLTA) at [RCW 59.18.060\(13\)](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=59.18.060) (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=59.18.060>) requires landlords to give tenants information from the [Department of Health](https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/contaminants/mold/renters-landlords-and-mold) (<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/contaminants/mold/renters-landlords-and-mold>) about the health hazards associated with exposure to indoor mold.

The information must tell you how to prevent and control mold growth in your rental unit to minimize health risks.

Mold grows in moist conditions, sometimes because water seeps into a building from outside, leaks from an indoor pipe or appliance, or builds up

because of condensation.

You can learn more about how to prevent mold from starting to grow and how to control and clean mold (if possible) at these sites:

- Washington's Department of Health: Renters, Landlords, and Mold (<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/contaminants/mold/renters-landlords-and-mold>)
- Washington's Department of Health: Mold Questions and Answers (<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/contaminants/mold>)
- Northwest Clean Air Agency: Indoor Air Quality (<https://nwcleanairwa.gov/projects/indoor-air-quality/>)
- Seattle & King County Public Health: Indoor Air Quality (<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/health-safety/environmental-health/healthy-water-air-soil/indoor-air-quality-mold>)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Mold, Moisture and Your Home (<https://www.epa.gov/mold/printable-version-brief-guide-mold-moisture-and-your-home>)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control: Mold (<https://www.cdc.gov/mold-health/about/index.html>)

Who is responsible for preventing mold?

The RLTA requires both landlords and tenants to act to prevent conditions that can cause mold growth.

Under RCW 59.18.130

(<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=59.18.130>), tenants are required to keep their rental units clean and sanitary as conditions permit, and dispose of garbage so moisture does not build up.

Under RCW 59.18.060

(<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=59.18.060>), landlords are required to maintain roofs, walls, and windows in reasonably good repair and maintain the rental unit in reasonably weathertight condition so moisture does not leak into the unit.

Mold caused by structural problems or plumbing leaks

If moisture is seeping in through a roof, wall, window, or other structural part of the rental unit, you may **ask your landlord in writing** to repair the problem. You may also ask your landlord to repair appliances or pipes that leak water into your unit.

You should **ask for repairs in writing as soon as possible** after you notice a moisture problem. If you do not report the leak and it continues to cause water damage, your landlord may try to charge you for repairs needed later, including removing mold.

Mold caused by moisture inside the rental unit

Moisture can build up on walls, floors, counters, and ceilings because of hot water usage, for example showering or cooking. Moisture can also build up on windows, windowsills, and doors because of the difference in temperature between outdoors and indoors.

Tenants should try to clean up moisture and keep the rental unit as clean and dry as possible to reduce the chances of mold growth.

If the moisture is caused by defective heating or air conditioning units provided by the landlord, **ask for repairs in writing** as soon as possible.

If you need help cleaning up moisture or mold

If you cannot clean or remove moisture or mold because of health reasons, you may ask for a reasonable disability accommodation. Try to get legal help if you need help asking for an accommodation.

Extreme and unfixable mold problems

Some mold problems are so severe that mold spores remain inside walls or other structures even after the external surfaces have been cleaned. Some mold problems cannot be fixed without major structural repair to the unit.

You may file a complaint or ask for an inspection from your city or county code enforcement agency. Some agencies will conduct an inspection of a rental unit only if you report a structural problem that causes a mold problem.

In some cities or counties, the official may issue fines to force the landlord to follow the code and make repairs. If the code violations or conditions are very bad, the official may condemn the rental unit and you may have to move immediately. Although the landlord may be liable for relocation assistance, you may not get the relocation assistance right away and may have to sue your landlord to get it.

If the mold problem is severe enough and practically impossible to totally fix, or if your landlord refuses to make repairs, you may have to move out of the unit.

If you need to move out before the end of your lease term because of a health issue, you may ask your landlord for a disability accommodation. Try to get legal help if your rental unit is so unhealthy that you need to move out.

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice. Find organizations that provide free legal help on our Get legal help page.