

# Caregivers' Guide to Mold and How to Prevent It in Your Home

**M**olds are part of the natural environment. Outdoors, molds play a part in nature by breaking down dead organic matter such as fallen leaves and trees. However, mold that grows indoors can cause problems and should be avoided. Mold may begin growing indoors when mold spores land on surfaces that are wet. When mold begins growing, it has the potential to cause health problems. Although mold awareness has increased in recent years, sometimes people who are suffering from mold-related symptoms do not realize it. The information below gives care providers information about mold-related symptoms and how to prevent mold from spreading in your home.

## What are molds?

Molds are fungi that can be found both indoors and outdoors. No one knows how many species of fungi exist but estimates range from tens of thousands to perhaps three hundred thousand or more. Mildew is one type of mold that can often be seen. Mold can be white, green, black, or pink in color. Many times, mold can be detected by a musty odor. Although mold spores are too small to be seen, colonies of mold growth are sometimes visible on damp walls and musty-smelling textiles.

Molds grow best in warm, damp, and humid conditions, and spread by making spores. Mold spores travel through the air and settle in moist places where

they reproduce and grow further. Mold can grow where there are leaks or where moisture collects, such as around windows, on walls, under sinks, or in the bathroom around bathtubs. It is also not uncommon for care providers to find mold on or inside children's toys, such as on teething toys or inside bath toys.

## Why is mold a problem?

When molds produce spores, those spores are breathed in and can cause health problems. Different people react to mold exposure in different ways. For some people, exposure to molds can lead to symptoms such as stuffy nose, wheezing, red or itchy eyes, and skin irritations. These symptoms can resemble a cold so it can be difficult to know if they have the symptoms as a result of exposure to molds or because of another cause. For other people, mold can trigger asthma attacks or allergic reactions to mold.

In more severe case, mold spores may go deeply into the lungs and cause serious illness. These can include lung infections and long-term respiratory problems resembling recurring pneumonia. People with a weakened immune system, such as people receiving treatment for cancer and people taking medicines that suppress the immune system, are more likely to get mold infections.

It is not healthy to live in a home with high levels of mold. In heavy or

prolonged exposure, mold can cause serious and sometimes long-lasting health problems. Children, the elderly, and sickness-prone people are usually most vulnerable to the negative effects of mold.

## How can I prevent mold from growing in my home?

Molds can gradually destroy the things they grow on. You can prevent damage to your home, furniture and children's toys, save money, and avoid potential health problems by controlling moisture and eliminating mold growth. Remember that mold spores will grow if moisture is present. Indoor mold growth can be contained by controlling moisture levels indoors and checking places where water or moisture may collect. If there is mold growth in your home, you must clean up the mold and fix the water problem. If you clean up the mold, but do not fix the water problem, then, most likely, the mold problem will come back.

While older houses may be more prone to leaks, new ones are also vulnerable to mold because energy-efficient windows and doors can keep moisture trapped inside. Follow these tips to prevent mold from growing in your home:

- Keep humidity levels as low as you can — no higher than 50% — all day long. An air conditioner or dehumidifier will help you keep the level low. Bear in mind that humidity levels change over the course of a day with changes in

the moisture in the air and the air temperature, so you will need to check the humidity levels more than once a day.

- Be sure your home has adequate ventilation, especially in the bathroom or kitchen, including exhaust fans and open windows.
- Check for leaks around the kitchen sink, refrigerator ice makers, and other sources of water. Repair if necessary.
- Open windows to increase air circulation. If you have a window in the bathroom, open it when showering.
- Avoid leaving damp towels on the floor or in laundry hamper.
- Do not carpet bathrooms and basements.
- Remove or replace previously soaked carpets and upholstery.
- Do not use heating, fans, ventilation, or air conditioning systems if there is visible mold growth in the system.

### How do I clean up mold?

To remove mold, start by washing clothing, rugs, stuffed animals, and other washable cloth items in hot, soapy water. Make sure they are completely dry before putting them away. For small areas of mold (those areas that are 3 foot by 3 foot in size or smaller), wipe down surfaces with a solution of one cup of bleach to one gallon of water and let them dry thoroughly. Wear protective gear, such as gloves, a mask and goggles, while cleaning mold on surfaces. For large areas of mold contamination, consult a professional trained in mold removal. Ask your doctor if your family should leave while the mold is being removed.

For toys, sterilize bottles, cups, and any toys that go in a child's mouth in boiling water or the microwave and then thoroughly dry off. Squeeze out water from bath toys, and hang them to dry. As a precaution from having mold inside bath toys, seal shut holes with a hot glue gun or drill larger for easy scrubbing. And most importantly, follow basic hygiene rules and your instincts: if you see black or green gunk, toss it.

## Bunk Bed Safety

Bunk beds are great space savers, and children love them. Although there are benefits to having bunk beds, these beds also can be dangerous. Every year, nearly 36,000 children are treated in emergency departments due to bunk bed-related injuries in the United States. Most of these injuries are to the head and neck. Half of those injured are children younger than 6 years of age. Injuries can happen when children are playing on the bunk bed or when they are sleeping. Therefore, resource parents should follow the safety requirements laid out in the RFA Written Directives and talk to their children about how to safely use a bunk bed.

If your child's room has bunk beds, the RFA Written Directives state that bunk beds must have railings on upper bunk to prevent falling and the bunk beds are not to have more than 2 tiers. Also, the upper bunk cannot be used by children under 6 or those who are unable to climb into or out of the upper bunk by themselves with an adult's help. Most children under 6 do not have the coordination to climb down safely or to stop themselves from falling out. The RFA requirements are in place to prevent children from falling out of the bunk bed and injuring themselves.

In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics offers the following guidelines to ensure your child sleeps soundly and safely in a bunk bed:

### SECTION 11-01: Home and Grounds

*(b) (5) The following shall apply to a bunk bed for a child:*

*(A) Bunk beds shall have railings on both sides of the upper tier to prevent falling.*

*(B) A child under six years of age or who is unable to climb into or out of the upper tier unassisted may not be permitted to use the upper tier.*

*(C) Bunk beds of more than two tiers may not be used.*

- Check that the mattress foundation is strong and that the right mattress size is used.
- Never allow your child to jump or roughhouse on or under bunk beds.
- Remove dangerous objects from around the bed.
- Keep the top bunk away from ceiling fans.
- Install a night light near the ladder.
- Do not use the bunk bed or ladder if any parts are damaged or broken.
- Teach kids how to carefully climb the ladder.
- Do not allow children to attach belts, scarves or ropes to the bunk bed. This can lead to strangulation.

Following the above advice can lessen the chances of your child falling out of the bank bed or getting into other accidents that can lead to serious injuries.

**Join us!** The newly formed Foster Parent Association, Chapter 120 of Resource Families United (RFU), will be meeting on the last Tuesday of the month. All meetings will be held at 3801 3rd Street in the training room from 6-8pm. Lite dinner provided. Next meeting dates are: September 24, October 29 and November 26.

# Celebrate Champion Lashawn Cox

**O**ur newest Champion for Children is resource parent Lashawn Cox. Lashawn currently has four teenage girls under her care and has been serving as a foster parent since 2005. Lashawn is a committed advocate for children who is focused on supporting academic success while building student confidence. She invests her time and energy into attending all meetings regarding the children in her care and she makes financial contributions to make sure that her children are involved in extracurricular activities that bring them joy. She takes advantage of all services available to her children and builds strong partnerships with service providers, creating a team to support the unique needs of each child.

As a child, Lashawn observed her mother directly serving children in need. When her mother encountered children facing difficult circumstances at home and were at risk of living on the streets, she would provide a safe place for them to stay. Her mother would contact the children's parents to let them know they were safe and being cared for. This experience set a precedent for the way that Lashawn involves biological family in her work; she says that she assures the teenagers in her care that "I'll never replace your mom, I'll be your second mom." When a social worker allows it, she is always happy to have an open line of communication with biological parents and family members.

Lashawn identifies a number of key values that guide her care. First is patience and listening. Lashawn says, "All these kids have different personalities and come from different ways of life and I make sure to listen when I first welcome them into my home." She also names privacy and respect as core values. She says that whenever a child is having an inner conflict, she is sure to create a safe and private space for them to talk it over together. Lashawn also believes that creating consistency in the home helps the



Champions for Children



kids in her care to feel safe and thrive. She spends a lot of time setting clear expectations around behavior and communication, but says that once the kids know what is expected of them, "then we can have a lot of fun."

Lashawn has sage advice for other resource parents. "Stay strong and be in it for the heart, no amount of coins will ever be enough, so be in it for the heart because if you're not, you'll fail." She also encourages resource parents to immediately notify someone when a child is out of control saying, "don't try to take it on by yourself." Lashawn believes that the continuous training she partici-

pates in with Alternative Family Services (AFS) has increased her understanding of the children in her care. It has also informed her parenting practice and keeps her strong. She relies on respite to take breathers and regroup when behaviors get challenging. Overall, she says that her easy-going nature and transparency are instrumental in connecting to children and building trust.

Lashawn views all of her placements as being longterm, stating, "I have them until they go to college." She is open to caring for children of all ages. Three years ago, she cared for siblings ages one and four. Now they have reunified with their birth mother and she is honored to be their godmother. "I believe this is my calling," she states with confidence, "and I wouldn't change this for the world."

San Francisco Family and Children's Services along with the Parenting for Permanency College applaud Lashawn Cox for her tremendous contributions to ensuring the well being of children. She takes on this huge responsibility with confidence and humility and a wonderful sense of humor that is deeply appreciated with everyone who works and lives with her! Congratulations to our Champion for Children!

## K.I.D.S.

Published bimonthly for San Francisco County foster parents, resource families, NREFMs and kin care providers. To suggest a topic, submit an article, promote an event, or provide feedback, email Sharon.Walchak@sfgov.org.

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Newsletter Website: <https://www.sfhsa.org/newsletters>

### Helpful Phone Numbers

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| HSA Operator                               | (415) 557-5000                      |
| CPS Child Abuse Hotline                    | (800) 856-5553 or<br>(415) 558-2650 |
| Foster Care Ombudsman                      | (415) 558-2828                      |
| Transportation Duty Line                   | (415) 557-5376                      |
| Licensing/RFA/Recruitment Hotline          | (415) 558-2200                      |
| San Francisco Families Making a Difference |                                     |
| Mentor Program for Care Providers          | (415) 557-5400                      |
| Free Foster Parenting Respite Service      | (415) 861-4060 x 3035               |
| Community Services                         | 211                                 |
| Non-emergency Government Services          | 311                                 |

FCS Agency Directory: [www.sfhsa.org/174.htm](http://www.sfhsa.org/174.htm)

## K.I.D.S.

# Message from RFA Program Director, Sophia Isom

The San Francisco Human Services Agency is truly committed to enhancing the support, retention and recruitment of all our resource families. In an effort to improve the working relationship between resource parents and social workers, our agency took the initiative to establish RFA caregiver convening meetings. The purpose of this meeting is to identify barriers or challenges and develop proposed solutions to resolve issues. This meeting is attended by resource parents, social workers, managers, supervisors, eligibility workers, and other agency representatives. These meetings have been very positive and productive. Various issues have been discussed, such challenges with communication, perceptions of complaint investigations, transportation services, placement transitions, roles and expectations of caregivers at Children & Family Teaming Meetings (CFTs), and many other topics.

As a result of these discussions, the group has been able to come up with a lot of positive resolutions and suggestions to make things easier for both caregivers and social workers. The outcomes of these meetings have been so successful that the group has requested to continue this practice for another year. This has been an exciting activity for us, and it is well-supported by our Deputy Director, Joan Miller, who has given priority to the needs to caregivers providing homes for our foster youth and non-minor dependents. I would like to thank all of the caregivers who have been consistently attending this meeting, but would also like to encourage others to join the discussion.



**Sophia Isom**  
RFA Program Director

| HSA Caregiver Convening Meeting   |  |
|---|--|
| Sept. 18, 2019 5-7 p.m.<br>3801 3rd St. San Francisco<br>2nd Floor Training Room                  | Oct. 17, 2019 5-7 p.m.<br>170 Otis St. San Francisco<br>5th Floor Multi-Use Room                 |
| Quarterly Caregiver Meeting   |  |
| Oct. 8, 2019 6-8 p.m.<br>170 Otis St. San Francisco<br>Born Auditorium                            |  |
| Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) Meeting  |  |
| Sept. 26, 2019<br>11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.<br>170 Otis St. San Francisco<br>7th Floor Conference Room | Oct. 24, 2019<br>11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.<br>170 Otis St. San Francisco<br>7th Floor Conference Room |
| Recruitment Meeting   |  |
| 3rd Wednesday of each month 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.<br>170 Otis St. San Francisco<br>Born Auditorium  |  |

**Special Announcements**  
**SA/HIV Infant Program Support Group**  
**English:** 3rd Tuesday of the month (Except December) 6-8 p.m.  
**Spanish:** 3rd Thursday of the month (Except December) from 6-8 p.m.  
 To attend, please contact Sharon at: (510) 282-4658.

| RFA Pre-Service Approval Training       |   |
|---|---|
| English RFA Pre-Service Training        | Sept. 10-19, 2019 (Tuesday/Thursday) 5:30-9 p.m.            |
| <b>Spanish RFA Pre-Service Training</b> | <b>Sept. 14 &amp; 21, 2019 (Saturdays) 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.</b> |
| English RFA Pre-Service Training        | Oct. 19 & 26, 2019<br>9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.                      |
| Placement Training                      |   |
| SA/HIV 36-hour Cycle                    | Sept. 7-Oct. 5, 2019 (Saturdays)<br>9 a.m.-5 p.m.           |
| CPR (English)                           | Sept. 28, 2019<br>9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.                        |
| ABC's of Baby Care                      | Oct. 9, 2019<br>5:30 - 8:30 p.m.                            |
| CPR (English)                           | Oct. 12, 2019<br>9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.                         |

| Ongoing Training  |   |
|---|---|
| RFA Advanced Training: Parenting in Oz                                    | Sept. 7, 2019<br>10 a.m.-5 p.m.             |
| <b>Spanish RFA Advanced Training: Grief &amp; Loss &amp; Child Trauma</b> | <b>Oct. 5, 2019<br/>9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.</b>  |
| <b>Spanish RFA Advanced Training: Grief &amp; Loss &amp; Child Trauma</b> | <b>Oct. 12, 2019<br/>9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.</b> |

**To register for training please contact:**  
**Alternative Family Services (AFS) [PPC@afs4kids.org](mailto:PPC@afs4kids.org)**  
**Or through your RFA Worker**