OTTAWA ABATEMENT

Mould Causes & Moisture

Why mould grows in Ottawa basements, attics and bathrooms, how to size it with Health Canada's bands, and when to clean it yourself

4 Expert Answers from Abatement IQ

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Q1

Mould found by an Ottawa home inspector, how serious is it?

A home inspector's mould note tells you where to look, not how serious the problem is. The next step is to measure the affected area and find the moisture source, because both of those things decide what comes next.

Health Canada sets three size bands. Small is one to three patches, each less than one square metre. Medium is more than three patches, or patches greater than one square metre but less than three square metres. Extensive is a single patch larger than three square metres. Health Canada says you can generally clean small and medium sized areas yourself, and recommends getting professional help with extensive mould growth.

Size alone does not tell you where the water comes from, and mould returns if the moisture source is not repaired. A professional assessment looks at both the visible growth and what is feeding it.

One thing worth raising before any wall or ceiling is opened: if the house was built before 1990, the materials behind that surface, such as drywall compound, plaster or textured coatings, may contain asbestos. Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test suspect materials before any renovation work that could disturb them, and a qualified asbestos removal specialist if asbestos is found. Cutting into a mouldy wall in an older home can become an asbestos job at the same moment it becomes a mould job, so it is worth asking about that before work starts.

We found no Ontario statute or regulation that licenses mould remediators or sets indoor mould limits. Industry guidelines exist, but none of them carry the force of law. A written scope should say what material comes out, how the moisture source is repaired, and that no visible mould remains when the job is done. Ask the contractor to put that scope in writing before signing anything.

A few things worth confirming with whoever you hire: whether they will identify and repair or refer out the moisture source, what they will do if they find suspect materials behind the wall, and whether the quote covers disposal of the removed material.

The contractor is the right first call, because they can measure the affected area in person, assess what is behind the surface, and tell you whether the moisture source is something they handle or whether a plumber or waterproofing specialist needs to come first.

Q2

Why does my Ottawa basement smell musty every spring?

A musty smell is a reason to look for moisture and mould somewhere in the basement. Possible sources to check include water coming through foundation walls in spring and condensation on cold surfaces.

Health Canada describes mould growth by size: a small area is one to three patches, each less than one square metre; a medium area is more than three patches, or patches greater than one square metre but less than three square metres; an extensive area is a single patch larger than three square metres. You can generally clean small and medium sized areas yourself. For extensive growth, Health Canada recommends getting professional help to assess and clean it up.

Before you do anything that involves cutting or removing drywall, plaster, ceiling texture or flooring in an older basement, it is worth pausing. Those materials in a home built before 1990 may contain asbestos, and disturbing them turns a mould job into an asbestos job. Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test suspect materials before renovating, and a qualified asbestos removal specialist if asbestos is found. If you have already disturbed something and are not sure what it is, stop the work, do not disturb it further, and have it tested by a professional before work resumes.

For mould that comes back each spring, the moisture source comes first. Cleaning visible growth without addressing the water entry means it comes back. Check the grading around the foundation, the state of window wells, the eavestroughs and downspout extensions, and whether the basement has any vapour barrier gaps. A professional can also check for condensation patterns on cold pipes and walls.

We found no Ontario statute or regulation that licenses mould remediators or sets indoor mould limits. Industry guidelines exist but none of them carry the force of law. What a reasonable written scope for professional remediation includes is: a description of the affected area, the method of removal, confirmation that the moisture source will be repaired or has been identified, and a statement that no visible mould will remain at the end of the job. After the work, check those three points yourself: the written scope was done, the moisture was repaired, and no visible mould is left.

If the job grows to involve drywall or other building materials and testing shows asbestos, Ontario's O. Reg. 278/05 governs the abatement work. The Type the contractor assigns, based on whether the material is friable and how much of it is disturbed, determines what training, notice and clearance testing apply. Ask the contractor to put the Type in writing in the quote.

You can request a match with local contractors through the form on this page; they are listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Put two written quotes next to each other and compare the moisture repair each one commits to, not just the remediation method, because a quote that skips the water source is quoting you half a job.

Q3

Medium mould patches in my Ottawa basement, clean or hire?

Health Canada says you can generally clean small and medium sized areas of mould yourself. Medium means more than three patches, or patches greater than one square metre but less than three square metres. If your basement patches fit that description, a DIY clean is reasonable, but read the rest before you start.

Fixing what caused the mould comes first. Mould comes back if the moisture source stays. Before any cleaning, find where the water is entering or condensing and address that first. Once the source is fixed, Health Canada's guidance is that you can clean medium areas yourself. If any single patch is larger than three square metres, that is extensive growth and Health Canada recommends getting professional help.

One thing to check before you touch anything

If your home was built before 1990, raise the asbestos question before cutting or removing any drywall, plaster, ceiling texture or flooring to get at the mould. Health Canada lists older building materials such as cement and plaster, drywall and spackling, and floor and ceiling tiles, and Ontario's guide adds joint compounds and textured paints and coatings. Ontario's guide notes that asbestos was widely used in sprayed-on material and in pipe and boiler insulation until 1973, and that many other asbestos-containing materials continued in use until the mid-1980s. If the remediation involves opening a wall or disturbing any of those surfaces in an older home, have the material tested by a professional before work resumes. Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test and a qualified asbestos removal specialist if asbestos is found.

We found no Ontario statute or regulation that licenses mould remediators or sets indoor mould limits. We found no City of Ottawa permit for mould remediation. If you do hire someone, the things worth confirming in writing are: a clear scope of work describing exactly what gets removed and how the moisture source is being repaired, WSIB clearance (you can search a contractor's current clearance online), and confirmation that no visible mould will remain when the job is done. A post-remediation check should confirm the written scope was followed, the moisture repair is complete, and no visible mould is left.

After the job is done, keep the written contract, the scope of work, and any post-remediation report the contractor provides. Those records show what was found and what was done.

Q4

Mould around the dryer vent in an Ottawa laundry room?

Mould around a dryer vent is a moisture problem first. Before anything else, find and fix the source: possibilities to check include whether the vent duct runs all the way outside, whether the exterior flap opens freely when the dryer runs, and whether condensation is collecting inside the duct or behind the wall. Cleaning the mould without fixing the airflow will bring it back.

How serious is it?

Health Canada's size bands tell you how to handle the cleanup. A small area is one to three patches, each less than one square metre. A medium area is more than three patches, or patches greater than one square metre but less than three square metres. An extensive area is a single patch larger than three square metres. Health Canada says you can generally clean small and medium sized areas yourself, and recommends getting professional help with extensive mould growth.

If the patches around your vent are small or medium, the practical steps are to fix the moisture source, clean the affected surface, and keep the area dry going forward. If the growth is extensive, a qualified professional should assess and clean it up.

One thing to check before you cut into anything: if your laundry room is in an older home, the wall, ceiling or floor materials near the vent may contain asbestos. Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test before renovating and a qualified asbestos removal specialist if asbestos is found. Ontario's guide lists textured paints and coatings, joint compounds and vinyl flooring among materials that may contain asbestos, and says many such products stayed in use until the mid 1980s. If a professional needs to open the wall to inspect the duct, ask about testing suspect materials first.

If you do bring in a mould remediation contractor, a fair quote should cover:

- A clear description of the area to be cleaned and how the moisture source will be addressed
- What happens if mould is found inside the wall cavity once it is opened
- Whether any building materials will be removed, and how the debris will be handled
- Confirmation that the vent duct will be inspected or replaced as part of the scope

We found no Ontario statute or regulation that licenses mould remediators or sets indoor mould limits, so the scope of work and the method are things to settle in writing before work starts. You can also search a contractor's WSIB clearance online before signing.

The most useful question to put to any contractor you are considering: if they open the wall and find mould has spread further than expected, what is the process and the cost for expanding the scope?

To get quotes, the form on this page goes to local contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Abatement. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa or your own municipality) before starting any asbestos, mould or lead paint project. Asbestos work in Ontario is governed by O. Reg. 278/05. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawaabatement.com** for the latest answers.