



10 Tips on How to Prevent Mould (Mold) in Showers and Bathrooms

[JULY 27, 2012](#) / [IAN TAYLOR](#) / 0 COMMENTS

Perhaps one of the most common issues with the modern bathroom/shower enclosure is the ubiquitous mould, or if you are from the US side of the water, mold – I often have to make this distinction, as here in the UK we spell it with the additional ‘u’ – and to make matters worse, I grew up in a North Wales town that went by the name of, yes, you guessed it, Mold. You can imagine the amusement this gives my American friends, but, I hasten to add, the name Mold has absolutely nothing to do with the family of fungi which we are discussing here.

The mould that we are talking about of course is far less pleasant. Mould can be found in a variety of forms, and colours, the most common being black, dark brown, ‘reddish’-brown and so on. Mould occurs where the right conditions are present, and the optimum conditions for mould are moist, damp, dank areas with limited air flow. Mould spores are airborne and present all around us, they will land on all surfaces, should they happen to land on a surface or in a situation where their optimum conditions exist, then they will develop into mould and thrive, they do not discriminate between clean and not so clean environments, nor do they care if their surroundings are those built from the finest materials that money can buy, or that of the most humble and modest of homes.

There are a number of proprietary products on the market aimed at cleaning mould – most are based on strong bleach (and there is just plain old household bleach of course). These can all help to remove mould; results can vary depending on the amount of mould that has been allowed to build up. Typically, a good spray with one of these products will kill most of the colour from the offending mould but it can sometimes be difficult to achieve a 100% clean. Very often,

particularly on silicone seals, there will be a tea-coloured stain remaining afterwards.

Like so many things, in the case of bathroom mould, prevention is better than cure. The following is a list of tips that can help keep mould under control. Not allowing it to build up and get a hold in the first place is a far better plan than waiting for it to accumulate then struggle to remove it.

Remember the ideal conditions for mould are; moist, stagnant areas, mould needs moisture to thrive. Now think about a typical shower enclosure; small and enclosed, after showering most people close the shower door/curtain and leave the shower cubicle engulfed in steam, which then condenses. In a one-person household, where such a shower is used just once per day, it will never normally reach a completely dry state, before it is used again (and so kept in a perpetual state of being moist). If we were being tasked with designing an incubator for the commercial growth of mould, we could do much worse than copy a shower cubicle! So we need to reduce/remove moisture, I know this sounds daft when talking about a room that is designed to get wet, but there is a big difference between getting wet, and staying permanently wet.

So here are my 10 tips on preventing mould growth:

1. **Increase ventilation** – Sounds simple, open a window during and for a time after showering, help to get all that steam out of the room
2. **Get a Good Fan** – Many shower enclosures have a fan fitted, however in my experience, many of them are woefully inadequate. Sure, any fan is better than no fan, but if it is not up to the job it will barely make a difference. There are plenty of low-cost fan systems available, so fit one if you do not have one, if you do, make sure it can cope with a reasonable amount of air movement. Often these fans are connected to the lights and sometimes have a delayed switch-off function – so they stay on for a few minutes after the light goes off – usually they are only set for about 5 minutes – setting it for longer will help to get rid of more moisture-laden air.
3. **Leave door /curtain open** – Sounds obvious but we all like things to look tidy, closed doors look neat (and hide the mouldy shower cubicle within!) but they lock in the moisture and keep the environment damp for longer. Open up the door and a lot of that moisture will dissipate far more readily. In combination with an open window and an efficient fan, a much faster flow though of air is allowed and the moisture will be far more effectively dealt with. This is fine with an actual door but what about a curtain? This is a bit harder, as curtains get much wetter as the fabric can hold the moisture, and we really need to dry them out as fast as we can – which normally means keeping them

stretched out – which conversely means closing the curtain on the enclosure. So, you have to get creative here, maybe shake the worst of the water off the curtain and try to leave it partially drawn so as to facilitate a faster drying but leaving some gap to the cubicle. Inevitably the shower curtain will need to be taken down and washed regularly if ventilation is poor. Some curtains are coated with water repellents and or anti-mould products, in my experience these do work, for a while, but their effectiveness will diminish over time and once it has been washed they can be lost completely. Sometimes a curtain will simply need to be replaced, maybe that is the time to look at a proper door?

4. **Remove moisture directly** – I am going to be radical here – take a towel and dry the walls! Sound ridiculous? It shouldn't, the above 3 points will all help remove moisture, but if you take away the physical water that is clinging to the wall right after you shower, then the area will be much drier, much sooner. OK, maybe there is no need to do this every time the shower is used, but, if the last person to use the shower that day just gives the walls a wipe down before throwing their towel in the laundry basket it will help considerably. Remember, no moisture = no mould.
5. **Keep surfaces free of lime-scale/soap-scum.** The typical pattern of mould build up is like this, the mould is worst/most visible on the silicone seal between the wall and the shower tray, then on the grout joints in the lower part of the wall where gravity keeps the moisture in contact with the area for longer, then maybe some spots higher up (from where the water splashes off the body) and then towards the top or ceiling, where the moisture from steam condenses. It is particularly common in grout joints because a) the grout is often porous so it soaks up some water, and therefore stays wetter for longer (compared to the glazed surface of the tile) and b) it also has a surface texture that will allow the mould to grip and anchor itself. Over time the smooth surface of glazed tiles (or polished tiles or stone) can become coated in a fine layer, of calcium from hard water deposits, or soap-scum (a reaction between some soaps and hard water). This lime-scale builds up and has a number of effects; it creates a dull/white deposit, which is bad enough in itself, but this deposit is also more porous and textured than the glazed tiles – and so renders the tile surface, more like that of the grout – and so gives the mould even more scope for laying down its roots and spreading. Keeping the glazed surface in tip to condition will help to prevent this. Mildly acidic proprietary cleaners are available which will keep lime-scale and the like under control, again prevention is better than cure here. If an acidic cleaner is out of the question (acid sensitive stone used in the enclosure for example) then try an abrasive cleaner like Microscrub – again if used regularly it will help prevent any build up.

6. **Use cleaner regularly** – OK this is really #5 part 2 – regular use of the type of cleaners mentioned above will also help keep the mould build-up down from the grout and other areas. The point is clean little and often, regular maintenance will go a long way to preventing mould from taking hold.
7. **Use bleach occasionally**. Some people do not like to use bleach – OK, I accept that, but again, like a lot of things, a little bit in moderation can help. I do all of the things on this list, but this, is something that I have done for years, and it works. AT THE FIRST SIGN OF ANY MOULD DEVELOPING I take a regular household spray bottle, put about a finger's width of household bleach I the bottom then top it up with water. I then spray the walls and grout joints etc. lightly, and leave it for 30 minutes to an hour, then go back and use the shower head to rinse it off. The faint trace of early-stage mould is now gone and will take another month or two to start to come back.
8. **Use Sealers** – Sealers will not stop mould from occurring. However, by significantly reducing the speed at which moisture can penetrate the porous grout (and tile if stone) it means that the grout/stone gets less wet, and dries much faster – so we have removed or reduced the exposure to moisture further. In addition, the surfaces will be easier to clean, by partially blocking some of the pores, any mould that does arise will find it much harder to anchor itself deep within the grout surface and so will be much easier to clean off.
9. **Anti-fungal additives**. This is more from an installation point of view – some products including grouts and silicone contain fungicides, which actively resist the growth of mould. Their effect is not permanent, but they will help keep a new installation looking fresher for longer
10. **Don't allow it to build up**. This is, or should be by now, kind of obvious, and ok a bit of a repeat point, but it is worth repeating. Keeping mould under control, preventing it from getting a hold, is far better than leaving it to build up then trying to clean it. Attend to any feint mould as soon as you see it and use the above list to help reduce the exposure to lingering moisture down to a minimum and you will not have a mould problem.