

Plain Language Statement

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health



Validation study of damp and mould exposure in Australian homes

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project. The following few pages will provide you with further information about the project, so that you can decide if you would like to take part in this research.

Please take the time to read this information carefully. You may ask questions about anything that is unclear or anything that you would like to know more about.

Participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part in the research, there is no obligation. If you consent to participating, you can withdraw consent at any time and stop your involvement.

A potential benefit for some participants is receiving test results on the presence of mould in your residence.

What is this research about?

Mould in the home can cause significant health problems for residents. Currently, there is no accurate estimate of how many houses are affected by mould – estimates vary from 10-50% of homes. Surveys have been conducted where people are asked whether their house has mould or damp issues, but since researchers have not made measurements inside the houses, we can't know if the surveys capture all the mould issues. There is also very little research about people's experiences living with mould, and how they have attempted to remove mould from their homes. This research aims to capture information from surveys, physical in-home measurements, and interviews. The data from in-home measurements will be linked to survey data and analysed to determine whether surveys are a reliable way to measure mould, and whether we can find hidden mould that residents don't know about.

What will I be asked to do?

This project has 3 parts:

1. Online survey
2. [Optional] Indoor environment measurement at your home
3. [Optional] Informal interview about your experiences living with mould

All participants complete the online survey. If you wish to take part in the indoor environment measurement and/or the interview about living with mould, you can provide your contact details at the end of the online survey.

All participants – online survey

You will be asked to complete an online survey about your house. The survey will take around 20 minutes.

The survey asks about:

- How your house is built
- Whether you have noticed problems with dampness and mould
 - If yes, details about dampness and mould
- Who lives in the house
- How the house is used.

You may choose not to answer any question. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you are interested in participating in the indoor environment measurement and/or the interview about living with mould.

Indoor environment measurement – home visit

This home visit is optional. If you provide your contact details and agree to be contacted:

1. We will contact you via your choice of phone or email to discuss the research and arrange a time for a researcher to visit your home.
2. During the visit, the researcher will:
 - Discuss the project with you and ask you to sign a consent form,
 - Take a vacuum sample from the floor of your living area and main bedroom to be tested for mould, and
 - Answer any questions you have about the research project.
3. The researcher will return one week after the initial visit to collect the data logger.

Informal interview about your experiences with mould in your current home

This interview is optional. If you have mould in your home, we would like to invite you to participate in an optional informal in-depth interview. This can be in person at a location that suits you, or via video call. You will be able to talk about the topics most relevant to your situation.

The interview will be audio recorded if in person, or video recorded over Zoom (Zoom generated mp4 file). Only the audio file will be transcribed for analysis and the video file will be deleted. The recordings will be used to research new perspectives on the effects of residential mould on health and insight into why resolving mould issues in people's homes is difficult.

What are the possible benefits?

For most participants there is no direct benefit to you personally for participating in the online survey. However, you will be contributing to research that has the potential to improve housing conditions and health.

- **Helping researchers to find out how much dampness and mould is in Australian homes**

This project is investigating whether we can accurately determine if a home has mould based on people's responses to surveys. If we find that survey responses match the data from the sensor and vacuum sample, this will mean we can use surveys to make estimates of how much mould is in Australian homes. This information will be useful to governments and housing providers when planning mould remediation programs.

- **Individual mould reports**

If you opt-in to the home visit for indoor environment measurement, you can choose to receive a report about which mould species were detected in your home.

- **Providing insights into experiences living with mould**

If you opt-in to the interview, you will be providing your unique perspective on how mould has affected your life and health, and whether you've had success or failure in getting rid of mould. This may help to inform housing and health policy in the future by providing justification for mould removal and home remediation.

What are the possible risks?

The survey has questions about the condition of your house, which could cause distress if this is a difficult topic for you. For the home visit, a researcher visiting your house may cause discomfort. To make the research as comfortable as possible, you may:

- Choose the day and time that the researcher visits,
- Have someone else present in your home,
- Ask the researcher to leave at any time,
- Decide not to answer any interview questions,
- Withdraw from the research project at any time, including terminating the survey or interview, or asking us to remove the data logger early.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, simply notify us at the email addresses above. Once you withdraw, we will destroy any indoor environmental data and interview data already collected (including audio recordings and transcriptions). It will then not be used in the final research project.

If you complete the online survey without providing any contact details at the final question, we will not be able to delete your responses as they are anonymous.

Will I hear about the results of this project?

Participants who choose the home visit for indoor environment measurement have the option to receive an individual lab report about their home.

The researchers intend to publish their findings in an academic journal. Since this research is relevant to government and housing industry professionals (e.g. builders, Community Housing Providers), the research team may also share results via plain-language reports and/or online tools.

You have the option on the consent form to choose to receive a copy of any publications arising from this research.

What will happen to information about me?

Confidentiality is critical to this research project. Data will be stored on a secure digital storage platform at The University of Melbourne (LabArchives) for 5 years.

Survey data, indoor environment data, and interview data will be de-identified and given a number which is not related to your name. This number, along with your name and contact details, will be stored in a separate password-protected file, and your data will only be re-identified to you for 3 possible reasons: if you nominate that you would like a copy of your lab report findings; if you ask to access your data; or if you withdraw from the project (in this case, data will be re-identified in order to destroy it).

No identifiable information will be included in any publications – all results will be presented in aggregate, with no way for individuals to be identified.

All data is only accessible by the researchers named on this form. You can contact them on the details above if you have any questions or wish to access or withdraw your data.

Who is funding this project?

Funding for the validation study on survey responses and mould measurement comes from a University of Melbourne Early Career Researcher 2022 grant awarded to Dr Ang Li (Grant ID 2165349).

Where can I get further information?

If you would like more information about the project, please contact the researchers: Dr Ang Li, Responsible Researcher (+61383445009 ang.li5@unimelb.edu.au), Prof Rebecca Bentley (+61383440639 brj@unimelb.edu.au), A/Prof Christhina Candido, (christhina.candido@unimelb.edu.au), Holly Jones (holly.jones@unimelb.edu.au).

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?

This project has human research ethics approval from The University of Melbourne 24051. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this research project which you do not wish to discuss with the research team, you should contact: Research Integrity Administrator, Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010. Tel: +61 8344 1376 or Email: research-integrity@unimelb.edu.au. All complaints will be treated confidentially. In any correspondence please provide the name of the research team and/or the name or ethics ID number of the research project.