Is the Mold ON Your Caulk, or UNDER It?

A simple plan for the black line in your shower: test it, clean it the right way, and know when to stop scrubbing.

1. The 45-second cotton ball test

- ☐ Wet a cotton ball with a little household bleach.
- ☐ Hold it on the darkest spot in the caulk.
- ☐ Count to 45 and watch the color. The color is a clue, not proof.

Fades before 45 seconds

The stain is most likely on the surface. Cleaning should work. Go to step 2.

45 seconds or longer, or back in weeks

The mold is most likely under the caulk. Cleaning will not reach it. Go to step 4.

Safety first. Gloves and eye protection, fan on or a window open. Light-colored caulk on ceramic or porcelain tile only: never natural stone, acrylic, colored grout or metal trim. Never mix bleach with vinegar, ammonia or any other cleaner. Rinse with water after. Asthma, chemical sensitivity, or mold over a large area? Skip the test.

2. The cold remedy for light surface mold

- ☐ Fan on, window open, gloves on.
- ☐ Spray white vinegar on the caulk and grout lines. Wait 15 to 30 minutes, then rinse.
- ☐ Separately, brush on a paste of baking soda and water. Scrub gently, rinse, and dry.
- ☐ Stubborn spot? Use 3% hydrogen peroxide in place of the vinegar.
- ☐ Never mix the two together: they cancel each other out.

Natural stone (marble, travertine): no vinegar and nothing citrus. Use a pH-neutral cleaner made for stone. Acrylic surrounds: follow the maker's care instructions.

3. The weekly routine that keeps it away

- ☐ Run the bathroom fan during the shower and for 20 to 30 minutes after.
- ☐ Squeegee or towel the walls and the caulk line, especially where water pools on the tub ledge.
- ☐ Clean once a week so soap scum never builds a food supply.
- ☐ Keep the grout sealed so it soaks up less water.
- ☐ Retest the darkest spot every few weeks.

4. Four signs it is not just a cleaning job

- ☐ The black comes back within a few weeks of cleaning.
- ☐ The caulk is peeling, soft, shrinking or pulling away. Run a fingernail along it.
- ☐ Grout is sandy, cracked or missing, especially in the corners or by the drain.
- ☐ A loose tile, soft wall, musty smell, or a stain on the ceiling or wall on the other side.

Any box checked in step 4? Stop scrubbing, and do not caulk over the old caulk: new caulk will not bond to it and it seals the water in. Keep the area as dry as you can, take a photo of it today, and have the caulk, grout and wall behind it looked at. Water on the floor, a soft floor, or anyone with breathing trouble: call now instead of waiting.

5. Keep this for your records

- ☐ Date of the last clean: _____
- ☐ Date of the last test, and the result: _____
- ☐ Photo taken of the spot: yes / no

Free assessment across the Kansas City metro. We look at the caulk, grout, corners and the wall around them, then tell you whether it is cleaning, caulk or grout repair, or a bigger water problem. No pressure.