

Condensation, Mould and Damp



Advice to Tenants and Householders

This leaflet explains how condensation occurs and how you can keep it to a minimum, thus reducing the risk of dampness and mould growth.

Damp can cause mould on walls and furniture and make timber rot.

Damp in housing encourages the growth of mould and mites.

Damp is more often than not caused by condensation forming on cold surfaces.

But it can also be caused by rising damp or weather penetration.

What is Condensation?

Condensation is a naturally occurring process when air laden with water vapour cools on contact with a cold surface, you notice it when you see your breath on cold days or in the bathroom on mirrors or tiled surfaces.

Condensation frequently occurs during cold weather and water droplets appear on cold surfaces and in areas of the dwelling where there is little movement of air, such as cupboards or wardrobes.

Condensation is frequently found on or near windows, cold wall surfaces and in or behind cupboards or wardrobes. Also it often forms on north facing walls.

Is it Damp or Condensation?

Does it leave a tidemark? Is it worse after periods of wet weather? - If so, it is not condensation, the source of a leak or dampness needs to be inspected, this could be from rain seeping through windows or rising dampness due to a defective or missing damp proof course.

Housing Maintenance Inspectors can give advice on damp and condensation.



Condensation and Mould Growth

Most homes will experience condensation at some point. Certain activities can increase the amount of water in the air causing a problem, and there are things that can be done that can reduce or remedy the levels.



Cooking, washing, drying clothes indoors, even breathing - all produce water vapour that can only be seen when tiny drops of water (condensation) appear on colder surfaces such as walls, windows, ceilings or mirrors.

It is possible that black mould will grow on this type of dampness.



For mould to thrive and survive it requires four elements:

- Moisture - from condensation
- Food - such as wallpaper or paint
- Suitable temperatures - the level of heating in your home.
- Oxygen - courtesy of mother nature.

By dealing with the causes of condensation you will more often than not deal with the problem of mould.



How to Minimise Condensation

Produce less moisture

Ordinary daily activities produce a lot of moisture, often very quickly.

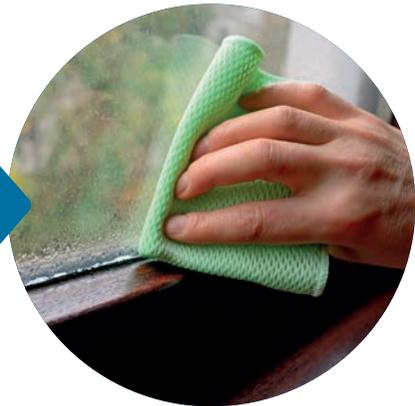
It is recommended to do the following:

- Cover boiling pans and turn kettles off after use.
- Avoid paraffin and portable gas heaters as these add moisture to the air in the dwelling.
- Dry washing outdoors or in the bathroom with the door closed, window open or fan turned on.
- Vent tumble dryers using correct vent kits. Self condensing types reduce the amount of moisture, but they are not as good as a vented type.
- Avoid drying clothes on radiators/heaters.



Remove excess moisture

Always wipe the windows and window sills of your home every morning to remove condensation. This is especially important in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen unfortunately just opening the window is not enough.



Ventilate to remove moisture

It is important to remove condensation and excess moisture by ventilating rooms. You can ventilate a room without making draughts or causing it to become cold.

To do this you may only need to open the window slightly or use the trickle vents that can be found on most UPVC windows. This allows warm (but moist) air to escape to the outside and lets in cool (but dry) air.

It is recommended to do the following:

- A) Always ventilate or open a window when using the kitchen or bathroom and close the doors to prevent moisture in the air from spreading to other parts of the house. Continue to ventilate these rooms for a short time after cooking, or taking a shower or a bath, and keep the doors closed.
- B) Use extractor fans in the bathroom and kitchen, this can significantly reduce the amount of moisture escaping into your home, by drawing it to the out-side.
- C) Open curtains for at least 4 or 5 hours each day, this allows moisture to get through any window vents.
- D) Do not block off vents. It is advisable to always leave open trickle vents on windows, and leave any other air vents or air bricks open and unobstructed.
- E) Do not completely draught-proof windows, especially in the kitchen or bathroom as this assists airflow.
- F) Open bedroom windows for up to one hour as soon as you arise and throw back sheets or duvets to air the bed and bedding.
- G) Leave space between the back of furniture and cold walls.
- H) Ventilate cupboards, wardrobes and avoid overfilling them as this prevents air circulating. Where possible put them on internal walls.

Remember the advice is to ventilate for an appropriate period of time, not leave windows open all day.



Heat your home a little more

In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm and avoid condensation is to keep low background heat on all day rather than in short bursts of high heat when you are in your home.

The heating controls on your radiators, room thermostats and timers will help control the heating throughout your home and help you to manage costs.

Keep Your Home Warm

- Heat your home at low levels for a long time rather than high levels for short periods, this will ensure that fewer cold surfaces form in the home.
- Heat the home even when there is no one there. Keep background heating on all the time during winter months.
- Heat using a dry source, for example gas central heating or electric storage heaters or a fitted gas fire. Do not use paraffin or portable gas heaters.
- Insulation and sensible draught proofing will help keep your home warm and will also cut fuel bills.

Dealing with Mould Growth

- Try to ensure that condensation does not occur on a regular basis, wipe away moisture regularly if present.
- If mould starts to grow on walls, clean them with a suitable cleaning agent. You can also use white vinegar or baking powder, or even a solution of the two.
- Carefully remove excess mould with a damp cloth and throw away afterwards.
- Do not brush excess mould as this releases spores into the air.
- Mould on washable/non-porous surfaces can be removed with a fungicide solution readily available from stores, or diluted bleach. Remember to wear rubber gloves, safety glasses and a face covering.
- Tea tree oil also works well as a cleaner, try 3 or 4 drops into 2 litres of hot or cold water. Soak mildewed items or use a plant mister on troublesome areas. Wipe and rinse off. Always test on a small area of wall beforehand.
- After treatment redecorate with a fungicidal paint or wallpaper paste, do not use ordinary paint.
- Large areas of mould can be treated by the Housing Maintenance team.
- If left untreated, mould can cause damage to the property and your belongings. Exposure to excessive mould can also cause health issues.

Other types of dampness

Rising damp

Caused by water rising from the ground into your home. The water gets through or round a broken damp proof course (DPC) or passes through brickwork if the property was built without a DPC. A DPC is a horizontal layer of waterproof material put in walls just above ground level, it stops water rising upwards. Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms, rising no more than 12-24 inches (300-600mm) above ground level. It will usually leave a tidemark and you may also notice white salts on the affected area.

Note: Black mould will rarely be seen with rising damp, this is because rising dampness carries ground salts which prevent the growth of black mould.

Penetrating dampness

Only found on external walls or ceilings. It appears due to a defect outside the home, such as missing pointing to the brick-work, cracked rendering, damaged or missing roof tiles. These defects allow water to pass from the outside to inner surfaces. Penetrating dampness is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and forms a defined damp patch that looks and feels damp to the touch.

Note: Black mould is rarely seen on areas of penetrating dampness. This is because the affected area is usually too wet and the dampness contains salts from passing through wall/ceilings which prevent the growth of black mould.

Defective plumbing

Leaks from water and waste pipes, especially in bathrooms and kitchens are relatively common. They can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch and remains damp whatever the weather conditions outside. A quick examination around water or waste pipes, seals around baths, showers and sinks, plus external pipework, will usually find the source of the problem.

Note: Black mould will rarely be seen on this type of dampness because it is usually too wet and the chemicals in a waste water leak will prevent mould growth.



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