

Damp and mould information and checklist

Damp in a home is caused by excess moisture. Homes could be affected by any of the three common types of damp:

- **Condensation** – this is the most common form of damp in rented properties. It appears when excess moisture in the air meets a cold surface, such as a cold wall or window. Condensation is made worse by inadequate ventilation, heating or insulation and tends to be worse in Winter.
- **Penetrating damp** – this is caused by water coming through external walls or the roof. It can occur when there is an internal leak or plumbing problem.
- **Rising damp** – this occurs when moisture beneath the building is soaked up into the brick or concrete. It is a common problem on the ground floor and cellars/basements of older houses.

Mould - damp can lead to mould growth on walls and furniture, mildew on clothes and other fabrics and the rotting of wooden window frames. The growth of mould can appear as a cloud of little black dots and has an unpleasant smell.

Damp humid conditions can also provide an environment in which house dust mites can easily multiply. The presence of mould and dust mites can make existing respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis worse.

The only lasting cure for severe mould is to get rid of the dampness.

Produce less moisture

Moisture in the home can lead to or exacerbate damp and mould. Where there is a potential problem with damp and mould, the following may reduce the amount of moisture produced:

- Keeping the kitchen door shut and leave the windows open and/or extractor fan on when cooking.

- Hanging washing outside if possible. Avoid drying washing on radiators. If you need to dry clothes indoors, open the window and close the door of the room where clothes are drying so that moisture can escape outside rather than circulate around your home.
- Not overcrowding your home. More people and pets living in your home means that more moisture will be produced.

Reduce excess moisture

- If windows or surfaces are wet, drying your windows, windowsills and surfaces in the kitchen or bathroom regularly
- Opening the bathroom window and/or keeping the extractor fan on when taking a shower or bath
- Keeping trickle vents in windows open. They are designed to ventilate your accommodation without causing draughts.
- Opening your bedroom window (for up to 20 minutes) in the morning and airing your bedding. A window slightly open may be as good as one fully open.

Heat your home

- Having a medium-to-low level of heat throughout the house by keeping the heating on at low all day in cold weather will help to control condensation. Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated rooms. It will cost more initially to warm the walls, but when the walls are dry your heating bills will reduce.
- Not putting your heating on for short periods of time (one hour or less) – this will make the problem worse. The air will absorb moisture quicker than the walls can warm up. When the heating is turned off, the air will cool quickly and condensation will be formed cooling the walls further.

- If you can, trying to keep your home properly heated. It usually helps to have a low background temperature of at least 15 degrees in all rooms.

Remove mould growth

- Removing mould growth as soon as you see it
- Wiping down or spraying walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash that carries an HSE “approval number” or a weak water and bleach solution.
- Not removing mould by using a brush or vacuum cleaner because this may disturb the mould spores and can increase the risk of breathing problems.

Ventilate your home

- “Cross ventilating” your home – opening a small window downstairs and a small one upstairs (ideally on opposite sides of the home or diagonally opposite if you live in a flat). At the same time, open the interior room doors as this will allow drier air to circulate throughout your home. This cross ventilation should be carried out for about 30 minutes each day.
- Ventilating your kitchen and bathroom for about 20 minutes after use by opening a small top window or using an extractor fan if possible.
- Keeping a small gap between large pieces of furniture and the walls, and where possible placing wardrobes and furniture against internal walls.
- Not over-ventilating your home by leaving the windows open as your walls will lose all the heat stored in them. Only open the windows for a short period at a time so that any moisture is able to escape. Then close your windows, leaving a small gap of about 5mm. It is advised to open the windows slightly any time that condensation is forming on the glass.