FACT SHEET

DAMPNESS, CONDENSATION AND MOULD GROWTH

Dampness, condensation and mould growth in dwellings is a common problem, especially in older buildings.

Mould and fungi spores can be allergenic. However house dust mites are the most common triggers of asthma rather than mould growth. House dust mites thrive where the amount of ventilation is reduced and there is a warm indoor temperature and high humidity.

Condensation will occur when water vapour in the air meets a cold surface and water vapour then becomes liquid. The more moisture is produced, the slower that this is removed by ventilation and the colder the surfaces, the more likely that condensation will happen.

Water on surfaces will encourage moulds to grow.

How do I know it is condensation rather than another problem?

It is not always easy to tell, but here are some key differences:

- Condensation is usually found on north facing walls and in corners, in cupboards, behind furniture and under work surfaces - in fact wherever there is little air movement.

- Condensation can often be seen as water droplets on windows or water pooling on window sills.

- Condensation is often associated with mould that looks like 'black spots' and is typically found along skirting edges or ceiling edges.

- Other kinds of dampness, such as penetrating damp or water leaks, usually produce a more defined damp stain.

- Rising dampness only affects ground floor/basement rooms and will often show a tidemark on external walls and solid internal walls in contact with the ground and typically only extends to a height of around 900-1000mm above the floor surface. Where such dampness exists the severity will reduce with increased height above the floor.

If you are not sure what is causing the damp in your home, start by checking pipes and overflows and under sinks to see if there are any obvious leaks. Have a look outside; you may be able to see if there are slates missing from the roof, cracked render or leaking gutters or rainwater pipes.

If you live in a new or recently modernised house or flat, don't forget that it may not have dried out from water remaining after building work. It usually takes several months (depending on the time of year) for this to happen and you may need to use more heat during that time.
What can I do about condensation?
Air can only hold a certain amount of water vapour - the warmer it is the more it can hold. If the air is cooled by contact with a cold surface such as a mirror, a window or a wall, the water vapour will turn into droplets of water – condensation and allow moulds to grow. You can get rid of the mould by washing down with a bleach type solution or fungicidal solution. You can buy special paints which may help prevent mould growth; however, the only permanent cure is to reduce the amount of condensation in your home.

The way you use your home affects the amount of condensation you get. This does not mean that you should alter your habits dramatically - just bear in mind the following tips:

• Keep kitchen and bathroom doors shut, particularly when cooking, washing or bathing - otherwise water vapour will spread right through the house and condensation will probably reach other rooms.

• The more moisture produced in your home, the greater are the chances of condensation, unless there is adequate ventilation. Nobody likes drafts, but some ventilation is essential.

• In winter open the window a little, only as long as they are misted up. If you fit draught stripping, leave a space for a small amount of air to get through.

• If you have an extractor fan, use it when cooking or having a bath/shower to stop the windows getting steamed up.

• Don't allow kettles and pans to boil away any longer than is necessary.

You will get less condensation if you keep your home warm most of the time. Heating is expensive but without it you are almost certain to get condensation. Below are some ways to use your heating effectively to reduce condensation:

• It is important that your heating system is checked regularly so that it works efficiently.

• Try to leave some background heat on through the day in cold weather. Most dwellings take quite a long time to warm up, and it may cost you more if you try to heat it up quickly in the evening.

• If you are struggling to pay for heating, ask your fuel supplier or your gas or electricity supplier about ways to spread the cost of fuel.

• Insulation will help you keep your home warmer, but remember you will need to keep some ventilation if you install draught proofing or double-glazing.

• If you use bottle gas or paraffin heaters you will need to allow extra ventilation. Flue-less heaters of this sort produce large quantities of water vapour and are best avoided if you have a condensation problem.
Drying clothes indoors, particularly on radiators, can increase condensation unless you open a window to allow air to circulate. If you have a tumble dryer, this should be vented to the outside.

Don't overfill cupboards and wardrobes. Always make sure that some air can circulate freely.

Never block chimneys up completely. If you are blocking up a fireplace, fit an air vent to allow ventilation.

Move furniture away from external walls to allow air to circulate.

Frequently asked questions

I am a private tenant, what should I do if I think my home has a serious problem with mould growth?

Step 1
You should clean the mould growth from all surfaces using a fungicidal or bleach solution (you may need to do this on a regular basis) and make sure that you follow the above advice before taking the next step.

Step 2
If the problem continues there may be some work your landlord needs to do to help you control condensation. Before contacting us, you should try to resolve the problem with your landlord first.

Some of the questions you need to consider before speaking to your landlord are:

- Is there a bathroom without a window that needs an extract fan?
- Are windows very draughty?
- Are extract fans in working order?
- Can you open windows properly to ventilate rooms?
- If the landlord has provided a tumble dryer is it vented to the outside?
- Is there a fixed heating system (i.e. gas boiler & radiators, or storage heaters) in good repair, which heats all bedrooms and lounges and is controlled by a thermostat and timer?
- Is there at least 100mm of loft insulation (200mm if electric heating) Is there any cavity wall insulation?

If the heating system is inadequate or old or if insulation is inadequate, you may be able to obtain a WarmFront Grant (Tel 0800 316 2814 or apply online at [http://www.warmfront.co.uk](http://www.warmfront.co.uk)) with obvious benefit to your landlord.

By raising these issues without involving the Council you may be able to encourage your landlord to do some work on an amicable basis. It will be necessary for you to co-operate with any arrangements made and allow a reasonable time for the work to be done.
**Step 3**
If you haven’t been able to resolve the problem with your landlord or there are particular reasons why you feel you cannot speak to your landlord we may be able to help.
We can only help if the dampness is serious enough to mean that some medical treatment is likely in the next 12 months. In making this assessment we cannot take into account medical conditions of occupiers, this is because the assessment also needs to apply if there is a change of occupier. As a guide, the dampness would need to be affecting the majority of rooms with large areas (more than 1m²) of damp plaster and associated mould growth. If this is the case please contact us.

**What should I do if I think the dampness is due to a problem other than condensation?**
Please see the section above about telling the difference between condensation and other forms of dampness. If you think there is penetrating or rising damp a plumbing defect or dampness coming from another property, please contact us.