

DAMPNESS IN YOUR HOME

With the rising cost of living and many households concerned about turning on their heating due to rising energy costs, more homes may be at risk of mould and damp this winter.

Mould can damage your home and impact your health; please read our guide below for information and advice on managing damp, condensation, and mould.



What Causes Damp?

A damp problem can occur when water or moisture works its way into your home.

There are two main causes of damp: a structure problem or a build-up of condensation.

If you have begun to experience damp in your home you need to first check whether there is a structural issue that is causing the problem – if you find an issue you need to get this sorted as soon as possible. Check for -

- Leaking or burst pipes and overflows
- Broken or missing roof tiles that are letting water in
- Blocked gutters
- Leaking windows
- Moisture rising from the ground (this shouldn't happen if you have a damp course)
- A leaking dishwasher, sink or washing machine

If the moisture is not coming from a structural issue it is likely to be a build up of condensation.

What is Condensation?

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If air gets cold, it cannot hold all the moisture produced by everyday activities and some of this moisture appears as tiny droplets of water, most noticeable on windows on a cold morning. This is condensation. It can also be seen on mirrors when you have a bath or shower, and on cold surfaces such as tiles or cold walls.

Condensation occurs in cold weather, even when the weather is dry. Look for condensation in your home. It can appear on or near windows, in corners and, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. Condensation forms on cold surfaces and places where there is little movement of air.

First Steps against Condensation

Dry your windows and windowsills every morning, as well as surfaces in the kitchen or bathroom that have become wet. If you need to dry clothes on a radiator or airer wring them out as much as you can before you hang them.



If your condensation issues carry on then there are more things that you can do.

- Use pan lids when cooking or switch on your overhead cooker hood fan if you have one
- Keep kitchen doors closed when cooking
- If you use a tumble dryer make sure that it is properly vented
- Move your furniture slightly away from external walls to improve air circulation
- Consider the installation of an extractor fan in rooms that generate a lot of moisture such as your bathroom or kitchen
- Open window vents if you have them

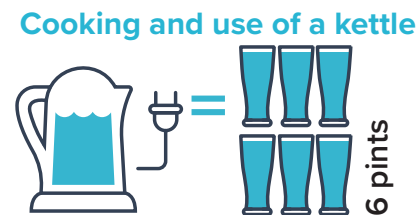
- When filling your bath run the cold water first then add the hot this reduces the steam by up to 90%

- Make a homemade humidifier by placing some baking soda in an open bowl this will absorb some of the moisture from the air. After water has been absorbed, the baking soda will harden and become solid. Replace the baking soda when this happens.

The key point is to make sure that you reduce the moisture being produced, and increase the ventilation. If your home is very damp then turn on your heating even for 30 mins to help reduce the moisture levels.

To give you some idea as to how much extra water every day activities can add, here are a few illustrations:-

2 people at home can produce



Bottled gas heater (8 hours use)



What is mould?

Mould is a type of fungus and thrives in damp and humid conditions. Mould can be quite common, especially in winter, in homes due to moisture and warm air meeting the cold air from outside. It can be common around windows and walls.

The causes of mould

Humidity and condensation are the most common causes of mould. Humidity is common in kitchen and bathrooms where steam is common from showering and cooking.

What mould can do to your home

Dampness caused by excessive condensation can lead to mould growth on walls and furniture, mildew on clothes and other fabrics and the rotting of wooden window frames.

What mould can do to your health

Mould can have an effect on your physical and mental health and can cause health issues such as respiratory infections, allergies, asthma, allergies, and sinusitis.

Those most at risk are:

- Elderly people
- Infants and Children
- People with existing skin problems, such as eczema
- People with respiratory problems, such as allergies and asthma
- People with a weakened immune system, such as those undergoing chemotherapy

How to prevent and treat mould

First treat the mould already in your home, then deal with the basic problem of condensation to stop mould reappearing.

To kill and remove mould, wipe down or spray walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash that carries a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 'approval number', and ensure that you follow the instructions for its safe use. These fungicidal washes are often available at local supermarkets.

Use protective gloves when using these products and keep the room as ventilated as you can, as the chemicals can be quite strong and irritate your eyes. Spray the cleaning solution on the affected areas with mould and use a sponge to wipe the mould away, for stubborn mould you may want to try a firm sponge, dish brush and a old toothbrush for tight spaces. Throw away after use.

For walls and ceilings, you'll need a paint scraper to remove the paint barrier and access the mould, then you can use a mould removal spray and firm sponge to remove. After treatment, redecorate using good-quality fungicidal paint and a fungicidal resistant wall paper paste to help prevent mould recurring. The effect of fungicidal or anti-condensation paint is destroyed if covered with ordinary paint or wallpaper. But remember: the only lasting cure for severe mould is to get rid of the dampness.

Prevention

There are some steps you can take to ensure that mould does not return or reduce the risk of it returning.

- Open curtains during the day to allow in natural light and fresh air. Moist dark spaces are breeding grounds for mould.
 - Try to keep condensation and humidity to a minimum, dry any you see gathering on walls, ceiling and window sills. Keep your bathroom and kitchen doors closed when you're producing steam such as having a shower or bath or cooking and open windows to allow ventilation.
 - Dehumidifiers can help remove moisture from the air. You can buy disposable or electric dehumidifiers at a range of prices and sizes.
 - Keeping up with regular dusting and hoovering can help prevent fungus growing. Wash and clean wood, cotton and cardboard regularly.
- If you use a shower curtain, change it regularly to eliminate dormant spores and reduce the risk of mould returning.
 - Check for leaks or damage to sealant around baths and showers
 - Keep your home well ventilated, use trickle vents on windows if you have them or open windows when producing steam or using an air dryer. Ventilation can help to reduce condensation by removing moist air from your home and replacing it with drier air from outside. Help to reduce condensation that has built up overnight by 'cross-ventilating' your home - opening to the first notch a small window downstairs and a small one upstairs. (They should be on opposite sides of the house, or diagonally opposite if you live in a flat). At the same time, open the interior room doors, this will allow drier air to circulate throughout your home. Cross-ventilation should be carried out for about 30 minutes each day.

- Ventilate your kitchen when cooking, washing up or washing by hand by opening a window or, if you have one, use your cooker extractor hood or extractor fan. Ventilate your kitchen and bathroom for about 20 minutes after use by opening a small top window. Use an extractor fan if possible - they are cheap to run and very effective. Ventilate your bedroom by leaving a window slightly open at night, or use trickle ventilators if fitted.

- Keep your home well-insulated during winter to keep humidity and condensation low, such as thick curtains closed in the evening, double glazing and wall and loft insulation. You can see if you are eligible towards funding for these improvements by emailing energy.advice@braintree.gov.uk

- Warm air holds more moisture than cooler air which is more likely to deposit droplets of condensation round your home. Air is like a sponge; the warmer it is, the more moisture it will hold. Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated rooms. That means that it is better to have a medium-to-low level of heat throughout the house. Keeping the heating on at low all day in cold weather will help to control condensation but keep a check on your meters to check how much it is costing you. If you don't have heating in every room, you could keep the doors of unheated rooms open to allow heat into them.

- To add extra heat to rooms without any form of installed heating, it is better to use electric heaters, for example oil-filled radiators or panel heaters, on a low setting.

- Prevent water entering your home via damaged or blocked guttering by clearing it regularly and ensuring seals are in good condition.

- If the cause is damaged brickwork or leaking pipes within your internal walls, it is best to call in a professional or refer to your landlord or housing association.



Your rights as a tenant

If you are a tenant and want advice about what to do if you have damp or moisture in your home there is information on the citizens advice page below.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/housing/repairs-in-rented-housing/repairs-common-problems/repairs-damp/

or just scan the QR code below:



Your landlord should fix your damp or mould issue if it's either:

- caused by a repair problem
- is serious enough to affect your health and safety

Common examples of problems your landlord must fix include:

- leaking internal pipes
- broken heating systems
- missing roof tiles or faulty guttering
- cracked walls or rotten window frames

If your landlord does not respond to you or refuses to provide repairs, the environmental health team can look into serious repair problems that affect your health or put you at risk.

They may want to see:

- evidence that you've reported the problem - copies of any emails or letters
- Photographs of the issue in your home

With your permission, they might contact your landlord to see what actions your landlord has taken.

We will come out to inspect your home if the problems appear serious and the landlord is not taking steps to put things right – we will inform them of our intent to inspect the property.

