

Damp, condensation and mould



**Sunderland
City Council**

How to keep your home free from damp, condensation and mould

Damp, condensation and mould are common household issues. They can have a significant negative impact on your wellbeing and how you feel about your home. It's important to know what causes them and what you can do to prevent them.

What are damp, condensation and mould?

Damp



Damp can form when moisture collects in an area and does not dry out properly.

There are four main types of damp that may affect your home:

- Condensation
- Rising damp - when ground water moves up through a wall or floor
- Penetrating damp - when water passes from the outside to the inner surfaces of your home such as ceilings or walls
- Problems with your water or plumbing system

Condensation



The most common cause of dampness in homes is condensation. It affects both old and new properties.

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. When warm moist air hits cold surfaces, such as window panes, outside walls, corners of rooms, mirrors or tiles, it turns into droplets of water, this is condensation.

Areas that have very little air circulation can also often have condensation. This might be behind sofas, wardrobes, and beds, especially where they are pushed up against external walls.

Over a long period, the build-up of condensation allows surfaces to become damp, creating the environment for black mould to grow.

Condensation is a greater problem during winter because we tend to keep windows and doors closed to keep the heat inside, meaning the moisture can't escape.

When moisture can't get out, it can lead to condensation (damp) and mould. The best way to avoid this damp and mould is to ventilate homes daily. This allows the air to circulate.

The main causes of condensation are:

- Too much moisture in your home

- Not enough ventilation in the rooms of your home
- The temperature in your home being too low
- Cold surfaces

Any sign of condensation dampness or mould growth is a sign that the air in your home is too wet.

Condensation should be wiped away daily. If left, it can lead to mould growth.

Mould



The appearance and growth of black mould is the biggest tell-tale sign that there is a problem with condensation in your home.

Mould first appears as black pinpricks and can often have a musty smell. It usually forms on decorative surfaces such as wallpaper, tiles, windowsills, and wall plaster. However, it can also form on furniture, cushions, curtains and on clothing stored in wardrobes and drawers.

Mould can spread very quickly and can become extremely hard to get rid of. It's important to deal with it quickly. Left untreated, certain types of mould can be harmful to your health.

How to prevent and reduce condensation and mould

Most moisture occurs in homes through day-to-day activities such as bathing, cooking, and drying clothes. This type of moisture is usually seen as condensation.

Reduce the amount of moisture you produce:



Don't boil kettles or pans longer than you need to



Keep internal doors closed while you're cooking or bathing/showering, so the excess moisture doesn't spread around the whole house



Make sure you put lids on pans when cooking



Open windows or use extractor fan (if fitted) when cooking or bathing/showering



Avoid drying clothes on radiators, dry them outside if you can

Wipe away any condensation daily:



Wiping condensation away with a dry cloth will help prevent mould from growing



Once you've wiped it away, wring out the cloth. Don't put the cloth on a radiator to dry



This can be on windows, window sills and surfaces in your kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms

Improve the ventilation in your home:



Open windows to allow warm, damp air to escape out of the house*



Don't overfill cupboards and wardrobes



Keep trickle vents in windows open*



Don't block air vents or airbricks in your property



Cross-ventilate your home for about 30 minutes each day. To do this, open windows at the opposite ends of your home to allow air change and circulation



Move furniture slightly away from walls to make sure air can circulate behind it

* Note: ventilate your home for an appropriate period of time, especially during cold weather. Be careful not to 'over ventilate' your home when it is cold, as it will cause the temperature inside to drop and make condensation more likely. It will also increase heating costs.

Keep your home well heated:



In cold weather provide a low background heat during the day. A consistent warm temperature of 15°C to 16°C keeps surfaces warm and makes it more difficult for condensation to form



Don't use bottled gas or paraffin heaters



If you can, have insulation installed in your roof, cavity walls and sloping ceilings.

When the home is warmer, condensation is less likely to occur.

Building elements and condensation



The structure of your home can also affect the amount of condensation within it. Factors such as the amount of insulation, the location and type of heating system and the type of ventilation system all have an impact on the amount of condensation in your home.

Certain areas of your home may be more likely to be affected by condensation. Examples of this could be in offshoot or dormer roofs where there is no or low levels of thermal insulation, meaning the area will be colder. When this is combined with high levels of moisture produced during bathing, cooking, and drying clothes indoors, it could lead to the development of condensation and black spot mould growth.

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External walls that don't have adequately sized space heating, and are therefore colder, are also more likely to have condensation on them compared to internal walls. Things that could be done to improve the issues include:

- Changing the roof system to a warm roof system compared to that of a cold roof design. Or providing additional insulation between the joists of the roof.
- Installing extract ventilation, which is operated by a humidistat, meaning it is independent from running when a lighting circuit is started.
- Providing adequately sized heating appliances of a radiant heat type (such as radiators) rather than convection (such as plug in heaters)
- Moving heating appliances from internal walls to external walls.

Treating black mould



If you have small amounts of mould in your home, for example, on your windowsills or around the sealants of your bath or shower, it is quick and easy to treat. However, it must be done properly to keep your home safe and stop it from returning. Good quality mould remover kits are available online and from most do it yourself (DIY) shops.

To kill and remove black mould:

- Carefully remove mould with a damp cloth and throw away after. Do not brush mould or use a vacuum cleaner as this will release mould spores into the air. It's safe

to wipe down and clean the area affected by mould

- Wipe down affected areas using a mouldicide or fungicidal wash that carries a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) approval number or try an off the shelf damp and mould treatment spray which can be bought at most supermarkets. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions
- After treatment and the mould has been removed, redecorate using a fungicidal paint or wallpaper paste - don't paint over the area using an ordinary paint. Remove any affected wallpaper as this will hold onto spores
- Dry clean clothes and shampoo carpets that have been affected by the mould

To prevent mould from coming back, you must manage the amount of condensation in your home every day.

Rising Damp



Rising damp occurs when water from the ground rises into your home. It does this by either passing through the brickwork or concrete of your property if there is no damp-proof course (DPC) or the DPC is broken.

Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms. It will normally rise no more than 300mm to 600mm above the ground level and usually leaves a 'tide mark' low down on the wall. You may also see white salts on the affected areas.

Note - Black mould will rarely be seen where there is rising damp. This is because rising dampness carries with it ground salts which prevent the growth of black mould.

Penetrating Damp



Penetrating damp will only be found on external walls, or in the case of roof leaks, on ceilings. It's caused by defects outside the home, such as missing pointing to the brickwork, cracked rendering, blocked/defective rainwater equipment, or missing roof tiles. These defects then allow rainwater to pass from the outside to the inner surfaces of your home.

Penetrating damp normally appears as a well-defined 'damp patch' which 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 contains salts which prevent the growth of black mould.

Problems with your water or plumbing system



Damp inside your home can also be caused by problems with your water or plumbing system.

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 of the water and waste pipes serving the kitchen and bathroom (and the seal around the bath, shower and sinks) and also of the external pipework, such as guttering will usually find the source of the problem.

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

How to report a mould or damp problem

If you rent your property and you have a mould or damp problem, please notify your landlord first. For information on contacting your landlord about property problems and repairs, please visit www.sunderland.gov.uk/housingrenewal

If you're a tenant of a privately rented property and your landlord doesn't acknowledge your complaint or take appropriate action, please contact us at this point. We will be

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able to advise on what we can do to help resolve the problem. You can contact our Environmental Health Housing Team by calling 0191 520 5551 or via the online form www.sunderland.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions

If you're a tenant of a Sunderland Council Housing property and you're experiencing issues with damp and mould in your home, please contact us immediately by calling 0191 520 5551 or email sunderlandhousingservice@sunderland.gov.uk

Financial support

For information about support and advice around money, debt, and reducing bills, please visit our Financial Wellbeing Support Hub at www.sunderland.gov.uk/financial-wellbeing

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