



A Guide to Damp, Condensation and Mould in Residential Property

Information for landlords and tenants

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Introduction

Tenants and landlords all need to play a part in preventing condensation and reducing the impact on living conditions and properties.

Taking reasonable steps to tackle damp and mould is not only about looking after your health, it's your responsibility as a tenant or landlord.

We hope that this guide is useful for all parties in preventing issues with damp, condensation and mould. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Pace team and we will be happy to help you.



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What is condensation and what causes it?

Condensation is water droplets created by warm air hitting a cold surface. This causes surface dampness and sometimes small puddles of water which if left unattended, leads to mould growth.

This is an issue affecting homes in the UK and is commonly caused by internal room temperatures with insufficient heating and a lack of adequate ventilation. If houses are colder than usual, for example because heating is not switched on, this can increase condensation.

If you live in a new or recently modernised property, you should be aware that it may not have completely dried out after building works. It can take several months for this to happen and you may need to use more heat during that time to reduce condensation.



What causes damp and mould?

If condensation is not addressed, this can lead to mould growing inside the property. Mould is a fungus that grows on wet surfaces, routinely caused by excess moisture resulting from condensation when walls and windows are cold and there is a high moisture content in the air.

Alternatively, in cases where damage or decay has occurred, penetrating leaks can cause damp or if there is a defective damp proof course, rising damp can occur in basements and ground floors. Please note that rising damp does not generally result in growth of black mould.

How do I know if I have condensation rather than another problem?

It is not always easy to tell, but here are some key differences that can help you to identify if you have a condensation problem.

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. It can often be seen as water droplets on windows or water pooling on windowsills. Condensation is often associated with mould that looks like black spots and is typically found along skirting or ceiling edges.

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



Who is responsible?

While homeowners have clear responsibility for dealing with damp and mould, in property with tenants the responsibility is shared between landlords, managing agents and tenants.

How is responsibility split?

Tenant's responsibilities

- Using an appropriate cleaning product at regular intervals
- Putting lids on pans and using an extractor fan when cooking or showering
- Not hanging wet clothes on radiators or drying clothes indoors at all, if possible
- Running a reasonable amount of heating in the house
- Keeping vents on UPVC windows open
- Ensuring that furniture is not preventing air flow by being placed against walls or in front of radiators



What can landlords do?

- Decorate properties using anti-mould paint
- Inspect the condition of the property at regular intervals and in response to any concerns raised by the tenant
- Ensure appropriate insulation and draught proofing are in place
- Ensure vents and fans are working properly
- Ensure tenants know how to use the heating system and thermostat controls efficiently
- Repair any leaks or plumbing issues promptly
- If property includes a tumble dryer, ensure it is a vented, not condensing, model. This is because condenser dryers convert hot air into water, ready to be removed by the user, vented dryers expel hot air through an external vent.

How should it be treated?

Damp and mould in domestic properties can lead to health issues and exacerbate existing allergies and respiratory conditions. There are simple steps that tenants can take to prevent damp and mould. Everyone should understand how daily routines can contribute to damp and mould around the house and how to prevent issues arising.

Simple preventative steps

Drying clothes

Hanging wet clothes on radiators increases the moisture in the air which then flows around the house, collecting on cold surfaces and contributing to the growth of mould. To avoid this, dry clothes using a tumble dryer if provided, on a portable heated plug-in airer with a cover or on any airer in a well-ventilated space with an open window or dehumidifier to draw moisture in from the air.

Air needs to flow, even in cold weather.

The average person breathes out approximately two litres of water every 24 hours and an average family of four will generate nearly 14 litres of water a day during cooking, washing, drying clothes and bathing.

Historically this vapour would have naturally escaped, however measures such as double glazing and insulation now trap that moisture inside the house. External windows should be opened regularly to allow fresh air to circulate. Trickle vents should be left open at all times. Without opening windows moisture builds up and creates mould on cold surfaces like walls.

Likewise, if furniture is placed directly against walls or radiators, or if cupboards or wardrobes are solidly packed with possessions air is prevented from circulating, contributing to damp conditions. Cupboard doors should also be left open regularly to allow air to circulate. This helps the temperature balance inside and outside of the cupboard which in turn helps to prevent the growth of mould on the cupboard's contents.

Heating systems

The World Health Organisation guidelines for indoor air quality recommends keeping rooms between 18c – 20c. For Further information, please go to WHO guidelines for indoor air quality: www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789289041683 Having on heating regularly, even at a low temperature, helps to prevent damp and mould. For any advice on thermostats or heating controls, please call the Pace main office.

Make use of extractor fans provided

Running a hot shower or bath, or boiling water for cooking creates steam and additional moisture in the air which circulates and collects on cold surfaces around the house. Using an extractor fan where provided, throughout and following showers and cooking creates a vacuum effect. Moisture is pulled out of the air into the fan and released outside through vents or pipes.

Please report immediately, any extractor fan that is not working. This can have a massive impact on condensation and the growth of mould and needs to be addressed as soon as possible. Extractor fans should run on after lights have been switched off for at least 5 minutes. You may have a humidistat fan, in which case it will run on until the humidity drops in the room. Fans do not use much electricity, and should not be turned off at the main switch.

Extractor fans should be cleaned regularly to ensure they work efficiently. To do this, turn off the fan at the main switch. It is vital that you turn off the power to prevent any risk of electrocution. You can do this using either the switch or the circuit breaker. Next, remove the cover and wash in hot, soapy water. Clean any dust from the inside of the fan that is visible. Depending on how dirty your extractor fan is, you may wish to cover your mouth and use eye protection. Once everything is clean and dry, replace the cover and switch back on.



Use a dehumidifier

A dehumidifier pulls moisture in from the air, thereby reducing vapour and dampness that is generated by, for example drying clothes. Portable dehumidifiers are widely available at different price points through online and high street retailers.



Add plants to lower humidity levels

Several groups of houseplants have characteristics that help to reduce humidity levels including the peace lily, ferns, orchids, palms and spider plants.

Remove pooling moisture to prevent build up

It is important to note that any condensation or surface dampness that collects on windows or walls, should be wiped with a clean cloth or towel daily. This will minimise the subsequent appearance of any black mould.

Penetrating or rising damp

If you see evidence of leaks from plumbing or from a damaged roof, chimney or guttering which is causing the water supply to penetrate the property or repeatedly flow against walls, contact Pace as soon as possible.

Repairs should be dealt with promptly to prevent more complex damage occurring. While waiting for the repair, limit any internal impact by drying surfaces and collecting leaks in a bucket or other container.

If you do not report leaks and damage worsens, you may have to contribute towards the cost of repairs. It is the responsibility of the tenant to keep the managing agent informed and report issues. As a managing agent, we can only request that your landlords makes the necessary repairs. If you are not happy with the standard of the repairs or what the landlord has offered, you can speak with your local Council, Citizens Advice Bureau or Shelter for further advice. If your property falls within a Selective Licensing zone, the Local Authority maybe able to insist your landlord takes further action.

Rising damp only affects ground floor or basement rooms. It will often show a tidemark on external walls and solid internal walls in contact with the ground. It 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.

Removal and cleaning

It is very common for mould spots to appear in houses around windows and in bathrooms and kitchens where increased water is circulating and gathering during washing and cooking. Tenants should dry any wet surfaces regularly and treat signs of mould either with mould and mildew cleaning products which are widely available from supermarkets and household retailers or with a white vinegar based DIY treatment.

Wear a face mask to prevent the inhalation of spores, take care to ventilate the room and protect your skin and follow manufacturers' instructions for any commercial cleaning products.

Alert us at Pace if you have concerns. Sometimes there may be a previously unknown defect in the building which the landlord can then address.



Damage

If you have any issues with damage or a need for repairs to be carried out, please contact Pace so we can organise an inspection and remedial works.

NB: Your letting agent is there to provide reasonable support with any issues arising from your tenancy and will listen to concerns and organise for an expert to assess for defects where appropriate. Please be aware that high energy prices are beyond our control.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WITH COST-OF-LIVING CHALLENGES

If you're struggling with energy costs you can find advice and support at:
<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households/getting-help-if-you-cant-afford-your-energy-bills>

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