HOW DO I KEEP MY HOME FREE FROM CONDENSATION, MOULD AND DAMP CONDITIONS?

Condensation is probably the biggest cause of what is commonly called 'damp' in homes. A lot of information and advice is included in this booklet to help you identify and reduce condensation as well as treating the mould growth often associated with it.

Condensation

This is by far the most common cause of what is called dampness experienced by tenants and householders, resulting in a large number of enquiries or complaints received by the Council.

Condensation is caused by water vapour or moisture from inside the dwelling coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The resultant water drops (condensation) may then soak into the wallpaper or paintwork or even plasterwork. In time, the affected areas then attract black mould that grows on its surface.

Condensation mainly occurs during the colder months, whether it is rainy or dry outside. It is usually found in the corners of rooms, north facing walls and on or near windows. It is also found in areas of little air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially when they are pushed up against external walls.

Note: black mould is almost *always* present with condensation.

Condensation and Mould Growth

The 'amount' of condensation in a home depends upon three factors:

- How much water vapour is produced within the home
- How cold or warm the property is
- How much regular air circulation there is (ventilation)

Simply turning up the heating will not sort out the problem, this may only temporarily reduce condensation. All three factors will need to be looked at to reduce the problem. Most homes will be affected by condensation. However, certain conditions can lead to increased areas of condensation, these include:

- Poor ventilation – not opening windows, blocking up vents not turning on extract fans, not allowing air to circulate around furniture
- Poor heating – which can be a result of fuel poverty
- Defective insulation – dislodged insulation in lofts.
- High humidity - not covering pans when cooking and drying laundry inside the house
- Overcrowding

The first sign is water vapour condensing on windows and other cold surfaces, which then takes a long time to disappear, allowing surfaces to become damp. The second indication is black mould patches growing on these damp areas.

Black Mould

Mould spores are invisible to the human eye and are always present in the atmosphere both inside and outside dwellings. They only become noticeable when they land on a surface upon which they can grow and then multiply.

For mould to thrive and survive it requires four elements

- **Moisture** - obtained from condensation
- **Food** - such as wallpaper or emulsion paint
- **Suitable temperature** – poor heating controls
- **Oxygen** – present in the atmosphere

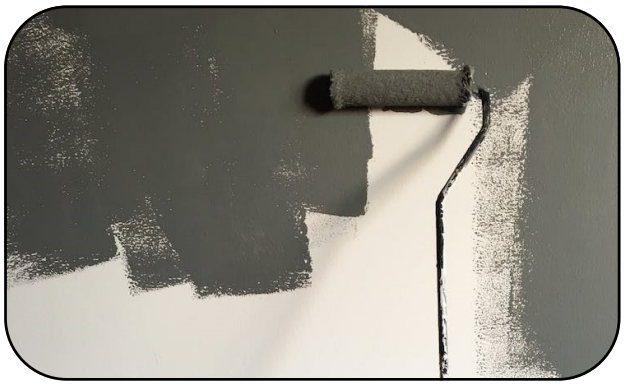
By dealing with the causes of condensation you will automatically deal with the problem of mould.

Dealing with Black Mould

It is important to tackle any black mould that you may already have.

- Carefully remove excess mould with a damp cloth and then throw it in the bin. Or if possible use a vacuum cleaner and empty after. Do not brush mould as this releases spores into the air.
- Wipe down affected areas using a fungicidal wash or sterilising fluid – remember always refer to the safety instructions when using any cleaning products or chemicals.
- Dry clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets.

- Tea Tree oil is a natural antiseptic and disinfectant but it's also great for cleaning especially on mould or mildew. Try a dilute of three to four drops of tea tree oil in two litres of water (hot or cold). Soak mildewed items in the solution or spray on to trouble spots using a plant mister. Wipe, then rinse off. Always ensure you carry out a test on small area of the fabric/material/surface beforehand.
- After treatment redecorate using a fungicidal paint or wallpaper paste – do not paint over it using an ordinary paint.



Deal with any issues sooner rather than later

If left untreated, damp issues will only get worse, its very important that you deal with any issues you find as soon as you spot it. Dealing with issues early on, can help you prevent the possibility of causing damage to your property.

Four Steps to Reducing Condensation and Black Mould

1. Produce less moisture

- Dry clothes outdoors. Avoid drying clothes indoors or if you have to, dry them on a clothes airer in the bathroom with the door closed with an extractor fan on or a window slightly open.
- Vent tumble driers to the outside (never into the home).
- Where possible cover pans when cooking or use an extractor hood if fitted, and avoid leaving kettles boiling particularly gas heated ones.
- Avoid using paraffin or liquid petroleum (bottled) gas heaters in the home. They produce large amounts of water vapour and are very expensive to run!

2. Remove excess moisture

- Always wipe the windows and window sills of your home every morning to remove condensation. This is especially important in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen - just opening the window is not always enough.

3. Ventilate to remove moisture

It is important to remove condensation and excess moisture by ventilating rooms. You can ventilate a room without making draughts or causing it to become cold. To do this, you may only need to open the window slightly or use the trickle vent that can often be found on your windows. This allows warm (but moist) air to escape to the outside and let in cool (but dry) air.

- Always use any extract ventilation provided when using the kitchen or the bathroom. For other rooms, open a window and close the doors to prevent moisture in the air from spreading to other parts of the house. Continue to ventilate these rooms for a short time after a shower, a bath or cooking, and if possible keep the door closed!
- Open bedroom windows for 5-10 minutes as soon as you wake up and throw back the sheets or duvets to air the bed and bedding.
- Leave space between the back of furniture like sofas and beds when next to cold walls (usually external walls).
- Ventilate cupboards, wardrobes and avoid overfilling them as this prevents air circulating.
- Do not completely block chimneys and flues and make sure you meet ventilation requirements for any gas appliances in the room.

Four Steps to Reducing Condensation and Black Mould (Cont.)

4. Heat Your Home a Little More

- In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms dry and avoid condensation is to keep sufficient background heat on all day rather than short bursts of high heat when you are in the house.

- Where present use the heating controls on your radiators, room thermostats or timers. These will help control the heating throughout your house and manage costs. Remember, it is not cost effective in the long term to constantly switch your heating system off. It takes far more energy to reheat a cold house than to maintain a constant temperature.

"The right heating controls will let you keep your home at a comfortable temperature without wasting fuel or heat – so you'll reduce your carbon dioxide emissions and spend less on heating bills." ***Energy Saving Trust 2012***

Common Household Moisture Producing Activities

Our everyday activities add extra moisture to the air inside our homes. Even our breathing adds some moisture. One person while asleep adds half a pint of water to the air overnight and an active person adds twice that rate during the day.

The table below gives you some idea of how much extra water you could be adding to the air in your home in a day:

Activity	Added Moisture (Pints)
Two people at home for 16 hours	3
Taking a bath or a shower	2
Drying clothes indoors	8
Cooking or using a kettle	5
Washing the dishes	2
Bottled gas heater (8 hours use)	4

Warmth Versus Ventilation

Striking the right balance between warmth and ventilation is important and can be very effective.

By partially opening windows or ventilating your home it may appear that you are losing the heat from your house, but what you are actually doing is allowing warm moisture laden air to escape and permitting cool dry air to enter your home. Dry cool air is actually cheaper to heat than warm moist air!

Many people who have double-glazing installed experience problems with condensation and mould growth on walls and furniture that they never had with their old draughty window frames.

This is because all the natural draughts around the old windows have been sealed. However, by using trickle vents or opening windows slightly, then the necessary ventilation can be achieved once again.

Remember - The advice is to ventilate for a short periods of time, not to leave the windows open all day!

Other Types Of Damp

Rising Damp

It is important to tackle any black mould that you may already have. Rising damp is caused by water rising from the ground into the home, and is very rare. The water gets through or round a broken damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the natural brickwork if the property was built without a DPC. A DPC is horizontal layer of waterproof material put in the walls of a building just above ground level. It stops moisture rising through the walls by capillary action. Rising damp can be present all year round but is more noticeable in winter. It may cause wall plaster to crumble and paper to lift in the affected area.

Note: Black mould will very rarely be seen where there is rising damp (and then only in the early stages). This is because rising dampness carries with it ground salts which prevent the growth of black mould.

Penetrating Dampness

This type of dampness will only be found on external walls or in the case of roof leaks, on ceilings. It only appears because of a disrepair to the outside of the home, such as missing pointing to the brickwork, cracked rendering or missing roof tiles. These defects then allow water to pass from the outside to the inner surfaces. Penetrating dampness is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well defined 'damp-patch' which looks and feels damp to the touch.

Note. Black mould is very rarely seen on areas of penetrating dampness. This is because the affected area is usually too wet and the dampness contains salts picked up when passing through the wall, which can prevent the growth of black mould.

Defective Plumbing

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 seals around the bath, shower and sinks; plus the external pipework, such as guttering will usually find the source of the problem.

Note. Black mould not always seen on this type of dampness because the area is usually too wet and the chemicals in a waste water leak will prevent mould growth.

Rising Damp

Penetrative Damp

Bad Plumbing

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When the office is closed, if there is an emergency, please ring the Council's Emergency Call Centre on 01524 67099, which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Calls may be recorded to help improve our standard of service and accuracy of information.

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