Damp & Mould Advice

What is Damp and Mould?

Damp is unwanted moisture in a building, and mould is a type of fungus that grows in damp conditions, often appearing as black, green, or white patches with a musty smell. It's a concern in homes because it can affect health (especially breathing) and can also cause property damage.

This information sheet provides practical steps to identify likely causes, reduce moisture, prevent growth, & deal with small areas of mould more safely. If you are unsure of the cause or the problem is widespread, seek professional advice early to stop it getting worse.

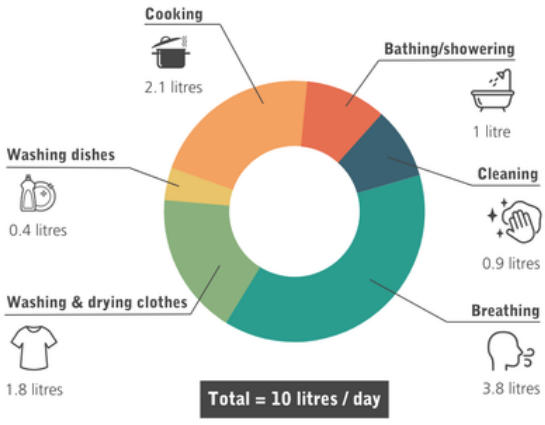
Common Causes of Damp and Mould

There are three ways that your home can become damp & each need to be dealt with in a different way:

1. **Condensation**
2. **Penetrating damp**
3. **Rising damp**

Condensation

Condensation is the most common cause of damp and mould in homes. It forms when warm, moist air meets cold surfaces such as windows, walls and ceilings. An average family of four produces around 10 litres of moisture every day through activities like cooking, bathing, drying clothes and even breathing. If moisture cannot escape through adequate ventilation, or if surfaces remain cold because of poor insulation or inadequate heating, condensation can build up and create the damp conditions in which mould is able to grow. Typically, condensation mould occurs more in the winter months.



Causes of Moisture (source www.cse.org.uk)

Request advice from Warmer Homes for Devon Tenants with our online form. One of our advisers will be in touch.

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Tips to reduce condensation

Heating

- Make sure that the heating is working well.
- In winter, turn your heating on often enough to keep a low background heat, main living areas should be set between 18°C and 21°C. If you can't afford this, then do as many other things on this list as possible.

Tips on Reducing Moisture

- Keep lids on pans when cooking.
- When having a bath use cold water first then hot this can reduce the amount of steam produced by up to 90%
- Dry laundry outside. If you're unable to do this, hang the washing in a room with the door closed & a window open, avoid hanging washing on radiators, if you have a dehumidifier then this can be used to help dry clothes. Make sure clothes are completely dry before putting them away.
- Keep bathroom & kitchen doors closed to stop moisture from circulating around the property.
- Avoid using portable gas heaters, as they make the air very moist.

Insulation

- Consider where your home could be better insulated. Our advisors can help with this.

Ventilation

- Regularly open windows throughout the property.
- Open windows in bathroom & kitchen during and after use, for at least 20 minutes to allow the steam to escape.
- Make sure extractor fans are clean & working & are used whenever steam is produced.
- Keep trickle vents on windows open.
- Make sure air bricks & vents aren't blocked or covered and are left open.
- Move furniture away from the walls to allow air to circulate.
- Use a humidity meter/hygrometer to see how much moisture there is in the air in your home (known as relative humidity or RH). The recommended RH is 40-60%, If RH goes above 60% there is a risk of mould growth.

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Penetrating Damp

Penetrating damp is another common cause of damp in the home. It occurs when water enters a property through defects in the building's structure, such as the walls, roof, floors, doors or windows. It is often more noticeable during periods of heavy rain, particularly with wind driven rain.

Common causes include:

- Loose or missing roof tiles.
- Damaged or blocked guttering or faulty roof flashing.
- External cracking on walls.
- Poor external pointing.
- Rotting timber or gaps around doors and windows.
- High external ground levels allowing water to bridge damp-proof measures.

Damp can also result from plumbing leaks, such as leaking pipes, damaged seals around bath or showers or faulty appliances.

It is important to remember that identifying the source of penetrating damp can be challenging. Water can travel both vertically and horizontally through a building, meaning the visible damp patch may not be directly beneath the point where water is entering. If you are unable to identify the cause, consider asking a qualified damp specialist to carry out a survey of your property.

How to Resolve Penetrating Damp

The solution will usually involve repairing the building defect that is allowing water to enter. This may include:

- Sealing cracks in external walls.
- Repairing external pointing.
- Replacing damaged roof tiles or roofing felt.
- Repairing or unblocking guttering and downpipes.
- Repairing roof flashing.
- Lowering external ground levels where necessary.

Some repairs may be suitable for DIY, but others will require the expertise of a professional builder, roofer or damp specialist.

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Rising Damp

Rising damp is the least common cause of damp in homes. However, it is often one of the most complex and costly problems to resolve, as treatment may involve significant building work. Damp is frequently misdiagnosed as rising damp when the actual cause is condensation or penetrating damp. For this reason, it is important to seek advice from an experienced and reputable damp specialist before carrying out any remedial work.

Rising damp occurs when moisture from the ground travels up through a wall by capillary action. In modern buildings, a damp-proof course (DPC) is installed within the wall to prevent this from happening. A DPC is a horizontal barrier, that stops moisture rising from the ground.

Rising damp can occur when:

- The damp-proof course is damaged or defective.
- The damp-proof course, has been bridged i.e from the external ground level, internal plaster or external render and or debris in the cavity wall.

Older buildings were often constructed without damp-proof courses. particularly ones built before 1875. Instead, they relied on breathable building materials that allowed moisture to pass through the walls and evaporate naturally. Problems can arise when modern, less permeable materials are introduced, such as concrete floors or impermeable wall finishes, which can trap moisture within the structure.

What Should You Do?

If you suspect rising damp, arrange for an inspection by a qualified damp specialist. A proper diagnosis is essential, as the treatment will depend on the underlying cause and may involve repairs to the damp-proof course, adjustments to external ground levels, or other specialist remedial works.

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Awaab's Law

Awaab's Law was introduced following the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak and is designed to ensure that damp, mould and other serious housing hazards are investigated and addressed promptly.

Landlords should investigate reports of damp and mould without delay and identify the underlying cause. Simply cleaning or treating mould is unlikely to resolve the problem if the cause remains. Repairs may be required to address issues such as leaks, water ingress, inadequate ventilation, poor insulation or other building defects.

Tenants and residents should report damp and mould as soon as it is identified and provide access for inspections and any necessary repair works. Keeping records, including photographs and copies of correspondence, can help ensure that issues are properly documented.

Please note: Awaab's Law currently applies to social housing in England and will likely be extended to the private rented sector through new legislation.

Dehumidifiers

Dehumidifiers can help reduce moisture in the air and are often an effective way to control condensation and reduce the risk of mould growth.

It's worth bearing in mind that dehumidifiers help manage excess moisture in the air, but they do not address the underlying cause of damp.

- Set your dehumidifier to maintain a relative humidity of between 50% and 60%. This is generally considered the ideal range for reducing condensation while keeping your home comfortable.
- On warm, dry days, opening windows to improve ventilation can be just as effective as using a dehumidifier.
- When using a dehumidifier, keep doors and windows closed where possible so it can work more efficiently.
- Choose a dehumidifier that is suitable for the size of your home and the severity of the moisture problem. Larger rooms or persistent condensation issues may require a higher-capacity model.
- Most domestic dehumidifiers are relatively inexpensive to run, although costs will vary depending on the model, settings and current electricity prices.

Treating Mould

It is important to remove mould promptly to help reduce potential health risks and prevent it from spreading. To treat mould, follow the steps below:

- Wear appropriate PPE, such as gloves, eye protection and a suitable face mask.
- Close the door to the affected room to help avoid spreading mould spores and keep windows open where possible to provide adequate ventilation.
- Remove mould using a suitable fungicidal wash. Always use the product in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Repeat the treatment if mould reappears.
- Dispose of furniture, soft furnishings or wallpaper that are so badly affected that they cannot be effectively cleaned or treated.
- Once the affected area has been cleaned and dried, a specialist anti-mould paint can be applied to help reduce the likelihood of mould returning. However, anti-mould paint should not be used as a substitute for addressing the underlying cause of the mould.

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Landlord Checklist

- Make sure there are clean working extractor fans in the bathroom and kitchen. Ideally these should be mechanical extract ventilators which run at a constant low level and then respond to higher humidity levels as needed.
- Where appropriate, consider installing trickle vents, if adequate background ventilation is not already provided.
- Ensure kitchen and bathroom doors can be closed to help contain moisture during cooking and bathing. Also check that internal doors have an adequate undercut (typically around 10mm) or other suitable means to allow air to circulate throughout the property.
- Ensure the heating system is in good working order and is serviced regularly.
- Insulate the property. This will help to increase the internal temperature and reduce cold spots which will help reduce the chances of condensation mould.
- Keep on top of property maintenance/repair any defects that appear.
- Where possible, provide suitable means for drying clothes, ideally an outdoor space.

Note: When improving the ventilation ensure it complies with the current standards such as Approved Document F.