Damp, Condensation & Mould

Damp, condensation and mould are the most frequently reported problems with student housing. They're unpleasant to live with and can seriously damage your belongings and negatively impact your health. If you spot this in your home, it's important to tackle the problem as soon as possible. This easy guide will help you understand what damp, condensation and mould are; the signs of them and how to try to manage them to reduce the negative impacts.

What are damp, condensation & mould?

Damp is when there is excess moisture in a room, there are three types of damp:

1. Condensation: what happens when moist air comes into direct contact with a cold surface, creating droplets of water. It is the most common type of damp.
2. Rising damp
3. Penetrating damp

Mould is a fungus that can grow on any surface where there is moisture. If any type of damp, including condensation, is left, it can lead to mould developing

If left unchecked, damp can:

- Make your house look and smell bad
- Damage your belongings – particularly causing items such as books to curl
- Cause mould on your walls, windows and doors
- Cause mould to appear, even within your furniture or personal items (particularly fabric ones such as beddings and clothes)
- Negatively affect your health by increasing likelihood of respiratory problems, allergies or asthma. Vulnerable people are more at risk from this.

Condensation is caused by four things:

1. Producing a lot of moisture – e.g., steam in the kitchen and bathroom, drying laundry indoors (with windows closed)
2. Inadequate ventilation – the moist air cannot escape from the home

3. Inadequate insulation – the home can't retain heat and/or has cold surfaces
4. Inadequate heating – cold air cannot hold as much water vapour

Areas prone to condensation:

- Cold surfaces such as windows, doors and mirrors
- Outside walls, walls of unheated rooms and cold corners of rooms
- Where large furniture items such as wardrobes and cupboards touch an outside wall (it can form on the wall behind the unit or within the item itself)
- Rooms where there is higher humidity or steam, e.g., kitchen and bathrooms

Condensation can happen at any time of year but is usually most prevalent during the winter months when the weather is much colder.

Identifying damp

Rising damp:

- Caused by a failure in floor damp-proofing, causing moisture from the ground to rise up into the property.
- Key sign is damp marks rising from the floor/skirting board
- Looks like a 'tide mark'

Penetrating damp:

- Caused by water from the outside finding its way insude
- Usually on ceilings or walls
- Signs on the walls are usually blotchy damp patches or crumbly plaster
- May cause drips and puddles

These are less common than condensation. The cause of these damp types is likely to be beyond the control of the tenant. If you see these signs, contact your landlord to investigate as soon as possible.

Condensation:

- Caused by moist air coming in contact with cold surfaces
- Hotspot areas are windows, external doors & mirrors

- Key sign is water droplets forming, and sometimes larger pools of water on surfaces such as windowsills.

Mould:

- Caused by excess moisture, likely to form condensation hotspots
- Look for ‘spores’, small circular ‘fuzzy’ spots on surfaces
- Usually black but may look green or grey
- May give off a musty smell.

Reducing condensation will help to reduce the chances of mould expanding through your home. Small amounts of mould can be easily cleaned, with an anti-fungicidal wash whcih carries a Health & Safety Executive approved number. Although, all cases of mould in a property should be reported to your landlord, particularly for serious cases. You have the ability to reduce or solve condensation within your home through making small behaviour changes!

Top tips to reduce damp, mould and condensation in your home

The most common form of damp in the home is condensation, which in turn can lead to mould. We have put togerher some actions that you can take in and around your home to reduce and manage condensation.

Keep your home warm:

- Try to keep temperatures in all rooms above 15°C. This will cut down the risk of condensation forming on walls and fabrics (it may still form on windows)
- Choose curtains that are thick and heavily lined. This will help to keep the room warmer.

Increase the air flow:

- Try and keep trickle vents open all the time. These are small vents built into the frames of modern windows which allow air flow but withour a draught.
- If it is a safe to do so, try to open all windows wide for a short time every day (around 10 minutes) to help with air circulation.

- Air rooms that are used regularly, particularly bedrooms, as a lot of moisture is produced overnight by breathing.
- Don't block any airbricks or air vents in the building.

Manage the moisture:

- If you spot condensation on your windows or external doors, regularly wipe them down with a sponge or a squeegee.
- If you have a condensation ‘hotspot’, try and get in the habit or wiping it down every morning and evening.

Think about your furniture:

- Try to place large items of furniture against internal walls.
- If you have furniture against external walls, try and leave a gap between the wall and item to allow airflow.
- Avoid over-filling furniture (especially wardrobes) with items so that air can circulate more freely.
- Frequently air out closed items of furniture to help airflow – especially wardrobes, cupboards and chests of drawers.

In the bathroom:

- When using a bath or shower, make sure to close internal doors, open windows and turn on any extractor fans or ventilation devices in the room, to encourage airflow and draw moisture out of the room.
- If it is safe to do so, leave windows open and/or extractor fans on for about 20 minutes after a bath or shower.
- Take shorter and cooler showers – this helps to save money and energy too.
- When running a bath, put the cold water in first, as this results in less condensation build up.
- Wipe down any tiles or shower screens with a squeegee or towel to remove standing water droplets.
- Hang damp towels up immediately to allow them to fully dry.

Washing & Laundry

If possible, try to dry clothes outside. If you need to dry clothes instead, it's important to increase airflow of the room to help moisture to escape. You can do this by:

- Using an airer to separate damp clothing items.
- Flip clothes at least once to help evenly dry and to prevet moisture build-up between folds.
- Close internal doors and open windows to help air to circulate.
- Avoid putting clothes directly on radiators as it prevents heat circulating – instead, use a radiator drying rack.
- Consider using a dehumidifer to help to draw out moisture, and to speed up the drying process.

Tenant and Landlord responsibilities

It is important to remember that as a tenant, you are responsible for any damage you cause to a property you are renting. Any repair costs could be taken from your security deposit. This includes any condensation damage if it is due to tenant negligence, as you are expected to properly heat and ventilate your home.

If you are taking action to reduce condensation and are still noticing damp, you must report it to your landlord to identify if there are any underlying problems causing this. We commend keeping a note of the repairs needed, as well as the impact on your health and any damage to your personal belongings.

We would also recommend taking photos of your property/room when you move into it, particularly if there are any damp or mould issues already present, as well as any issues that you see and/or raise with your landlord during your tenancy.

Landlords are responsible for removing mould and fixing underlying damp problems. They also have a responsiblity to ensure there is sufficient ventilation in a property and should notify tenants of potential condensation issues at the start of the tenancy and how you might be able to prevent it getting any worse.