



Cheshire West & Chester Council

# What to do if your property is damp or has mould



**This leaflet explains how condensation forms and how you can keep it to a minimum and reduce the risk of dampness and mould growth.**

How do I know if my home is damp?

Damp can cause mould on walls and furniture and make window frames rot. Damp and cold housing encourages the growth of mould and mites, as mites feed on moulds and can increase the risk of respiratory illnesses in some people. Some damp is caused by condensation.

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## Taking steps to address condensation

**You will need to take proper steps to deal with condensation, but meanwhile there are some measures you can take right away.** Wipe down the windows and sills every morning. Wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.

Condensation channels and sponge strips can be bought at DIY shops. They are fitted to windows to collect the condensation and help prevent window frames from rotting and avoid damp forming under sills.

### Taking steps to address mould

First treat the mould already in your home. If you deal with the basic problem, mould should not reappear.

To kill and remove mould, wipe down walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash which carries a **Health and Safety Executive 'approval number'**. Follow the manufacturer's instructions precisely.

Dry-clean mildewed clothes, and shampoo carpets. Disturbing mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning can increase the risk of respiratory problems.

After treatment redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould. Note that this paint is not effective if overlaid with ordinary paints or wallpaper.

When wallpapering, use a paste containing a fungicide to prevent further mould growth. The only lasting way of avoiding severe mould is to eliminate dampness.



### Is it condensation?

Condensation is not the only cause of damp. **It can also come from:**

- Rain seeping through the roof where a tile or slate is missing, spilling from a blocked gutter, penetrating around window frames, or leaking through a cracked pipe
- Rising damp due to a defective damp-course or because there is no damp-course. These causes of damp often leave a 'tidemark' and you should have the necessary repairs carried out to remove the source of damp.

If your home is damp for any of these reasons it may take weeks of heating and ventilating to dry out.

## What is condensation?

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If the air gets colder it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. This is condensation. You may notice it when you see your breath on a cold day, or when the mirror mists over when you have a bath.

Condensation occurs mainly during cold weather, whether it is raining or dry. It does not leave a 'tidemark'. It appears in places where there is little movement of air. Look for it in corners, on or near windows, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. It often forms on north-facing walls.

## How to avoid condensation

These four steps will help you reduce the condensation in your home.

### 1. Produce less moisture

Some ordinary daily activities produce a lot of moisture very quickly such as the following:

- **Cooking:** To reduce the amount of moisture, cover pans and do not leave kettles boiling.
- **Paraffin and portable flueless bottled-gas heaters:** Do not use these heaters as they can pose other dangers to your home.
- **Washing clothes:** Put washing outdoors to dry if you can. Or put it in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open or fan on. It is best to fit a fan that can be switched to run continuously for clothes drying.



### 2. Ventilate to remove the moisture

You can ventilate your home without making draughts. Some ventilation is needed to get rid of moisture being produced all the time, including that from people's breath. You should try the following measures:

- Keep a small window ajar or trickle ventilators open all the time if possible, and especially when someone is in the room.
- You need more ventilation in the kitchen and bathroom when cooking, washing up, bathing and drying clothes. This means opening the windows wider.
- Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use even if your kitchen or bathroom has an extractor fan. It will help to draught proof these doors. Doing this will help stop the moisture reaching other rooms, especially bedrooms, which are often colder and more likely to get condensation.
- Allow space for the air to circulate in and around your furniture. Open doors to ventilate cupboards and wardrobes.



- Leave space between the backs of wardrobes and the wall. Where possible, position wardrobes and furniture against internal walls, i.e. walls which have a room on both sides, rather than against outside walls.
- When you have a curtain or blind drawn, it makes the surface of the window cooler and increases condensation, especially with single glazed windows.
- Trickle ventilators can help reduce the problem. If you replace your windows at any time, make sure they are double glazed and fitted with trickle ventilators.

### 3. Insulate and draught proof

Insulation in the loft, cavity wall insulation and draught proofing of windows and outside doors will help keep your home warm and you will have lower fuel bills as well. When the whole home is warmer, condensation is less likely.

#### When draught proofing:

- Do not block permanent ventilators.
- Do not completely block chimneys (leave a hole about two bricks in size and fit a louvered grille over it).
- Do not draught proof rooms where there is a fuel burning heater (e.g. gas fire) or cooker.
- Do not draught proof windows in the bathroom or kitchen.

### 4. Heat your home a little more

In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm enough to avoid condensation is to keep low background heating on all day, even when there is no one at home.

This is very important in flats and bungalows and other dwellings where the bedrooms are not above a warm living room. If you have central heating set it to provide background warmth in all rooms including unused rooms.

## Tenant and Landlord Responsibilities

If you are a tenant, it is your responsibility to report any serious damp problems to your landlord so that they can carry out any necessary repairs. You should also take on board the advice detailed in this leaflet to minimise the occurrence of condensation.

If you are a landlord, you have a responsibility under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to assess hazards and risks within your rental property. Local authorities are under a duty to take action against Category 1 Hazards. Damp is one of the hazards assessed, so you need to take seriously any complaints you receive from your tenant.