

How to control damp, condensation and mould in your home

A Step by Step Guide



This guide is aimed at tenants, landlords and homeowners who are experiencing problems of dampness, condensation and mould within their home.

How to identify the type of dampness you may have

Dampness in the home tends to happen for three main reasons:

1. Rising Damp

- This is the movement of moisture from the ground, up through the walls of a building
- This generally happens due to a breach of the damp proof course (DPC) or in older houses where no DPC exists
- The DPC is a layer or membrane and is designed to stop water moving up through the structure
- Rising damp can normally be identified by dark brown, damp areas to the base of ground floor walls, usually rising to a maximum height of one metre
- With this type of damp, moisture tends to move up through the building over time in 'waves' and sometimes it leaves lines of staining and salt like deposits behind as it rises up and then dries out
- Little or no mould growth tends to occur with rising damp



2. Penetrating Damp

- Water which generally passes through the fabric of the building from any angle, is often described as penetrating dampness. This could occur for a wide range of reasons, for example, as a result of a leak to a roof or around a chimney, resulting in a brown, damp stained area to the ceiling or wall
- Again the water tends to move through the building in 'waves', sometimes leaving salt like deposits behind

3. Condensation

- Condensation and its associated mould growth is one of the most common problems that affect homes in this country.
- Condensation is 'surface only dampness' and occurs when water vapour present within the air of your home condenses on a cold surface, such as a window, forming a thin film of moisture where mould can easily grow.
- This can be caused by a range of issues including cold internal room temperatures from a lack of heating, a lack of adequate ventilation or poor thermal insulation
- Condensation is a very common cause of mould growth within homes and it can affect not just windows, but also walls, ceilings, furniture and also possessions.



What should I do next?

If you think you have Rising or Penetrating Damp

If you are a Tenant:

If you rent your home and believe that you have a problem with rising dampness or penetrating dampness, then you should inform your landlord or letting agent as soon as possible. Sometimes it can be useful to put this in writing to them. Your landlord should then investigate your concerns in an appropriate and timely way.

In the first instance it is normally better to try and resolve any concerns you may have directly with your landlord. However if you are not satisfied with their response, then you can obtain further advice, including a possible home visit, from the Councils Housing Standards Team, who can be contacted at:

 www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions

If you are an owner occupier:

If you own your home and you need works carried out to remedy rising, penetrating dampness or other major repairs, then some limited financial assistance may be available from Dorset Council. Further details can be found at: www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housinggrants

If you think you have Condensation or Mould Growth

What is condensation?

Condensation occurs when moisture in the air comes into contact with a cold surface. This moisture in the air condenses on colder surfaces creating a thin film of moisture upon which mould can grow. An example of this is the misting that can occur to the inside of a window pane on a cold morning. However condensation and mould growth can also occur on walls, ceilings, furniture and also possessions.

Why does condensation occur?

The reasons for condensation can be wide ranging and complex, but can include:

Water vapour in the air:

Water vapour is present in the air around us all the time. Within houses, this water in the air mainly comes from normal household activities like washing, drying clothes and cooking. It is estimated that a household of only two people can produce up to 24 pints of water a day from these types of activities.

Generally, the more water vapour that is in the air, the more likely you are to be at risk of having a condensation and mould problem.

The amount of water in the air is often measured using a 'relative humidity scale' (%). A comfortable relative humidity level within an occupied home is normally around 40-55%.

Homes with a relative humidity level regularly above 60% are at a higher risk of condensation and mould problems.

Ventilation:

Providing a house with good ventilation will help to remove the water vapour created from normal household activities, like washing, drying clothes and cooking.

Opening windows, using window trickle vents and using mechanical extract fans if you have them, are all ways to ventilate your home and remove excessive water vapour in the air.

Bathrooms and kitchens tend to create the most water vapour from activities like washing and cooking. Providing these rooms with good ventilation is therefore particularly important.

Care needs to be taken not to 'over-ventilate' your home, as heat will then be lost, causing cool spots where condensation can occur.

Insulation:

Homes that lack reasonable levels of thermal insulation, lose heat easily and are more expensive to run. This can also lead to cold spots on surfaces where condensation and mould growth can occur.

The cheapest and most cost effective forms of thermal insulation are normally loft insulation and cavity wall insulation. To find out if you are eligible for a grant for either of these works contact

www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housinggrants. If you are a

tenant you will need to get your landlords permission to apply for a grant and get these types of works carried out.



Heating:

All homes need to have an adequate fixed heating system to all rooms, which is capable of maintaining a suitable indoor temperature throughout the whole year.

Condensation can often occur when a house is not heated to a suitable temperature, this can happen when the heating system is faulty, it is not suitable for the property in question or the occupants do not use it correctly or cannot afford to use it.

Maintaining a healthy and consistent indoor temperature can help to manage a condensation problem. An indoor temperature of 21 degrees Celsius to a living room and at least 18 degrees Celsius to other rooms, will assist in managing a condensation problem.



Where does condensation occur?

Condensation and associated mould growth can typically affect window panes, the window reveals, unheated rooms, wall and ceiling surfaces, particularly in the corners of rooms where air does not circulate and can also affect possessions and furniture.

When does condensation typically occur?

Condensation can form at any time. More persistent condensation problems and the associated mould growth that goes with it tends to mainly happen between the autumn and winter months of October to April, when external temperatures are lower, houses get colder and less ventilation occurs.

How can condensation be controlled?

Try and produce less moisture in your home:

- Put lids on pans when cooking.
- Keep kitchen and bathroom doors shut when cooking and washing and provide good ventilation to these rooms when they are in use and shortly after.
- Avoid drying clothes indoors if possible. Where you have to, try and use a specific room, keep it well ventilated and the door shut.
- Tumble dryers should always be vented to the outside air.

Provide adequate heating:

Ensure that adequate fixed heating is present in all rooms. If you rent your home and you feel the heating system is inadequate, discuss the matter with you landlord. If you think your landlords response is not adequate, Dorset Council maybe able to assist in working with your landlord to get improvements carried out.

Further information can be obtained from:

 www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions

Properly use any heating system that is provided. Aim for a room temperature of at least 21 degrees Celsius to the living room and at least 18 degrees Celsius to all other rooms.

Ensure Ventilation:

Ensure that your home is reasonably well ventilated using windows, trickle vents and/or mechanical extract fans.

Particular attention should be given to ventilating bathrooms and kitchens, where most water vapour is created from washing and cooking.

Removing mould:

Any mould caused by condensation will not 'die back' on its own.

To enable you to check any improvements, areas of mould should be washed off using a specialist mould and mildew cleaner. These are available from most supermarkets and hardware stores.

Where can I get further information?

The Council's website  www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing


Tenants can report the condition of their home at
 www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions

For information about energy efficiency, insulation and heating grants and loans contact:

 www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housinggrants

Contact telephone numbers for local offices

North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland areas:

 **01305 251010**

Purbeck area:  **01929 556561**

East Dorset area:  **01202 795096**