

Damp - Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

Dampness, condensation and mould growth in dwellings is a commonplace problem, especially in older buildings. Condensation can often be seen as water droplets on windows or water pooling on window cills. If you find patches of mould on walls, furnishings or clothes and have patches of damp it is possible condensation may be the cause. The following advice will help you solve the problem

1. **How do I know if it is condensation?**
2. **What could be causing the damp in my home?**
3. **Why am I getting condensation and mould growth?**
4. **Why does mould appear?**
5. **Is dampness, condensation and mould bad for my health?**
6. **What can I do to get rid of mould?**
7. **Can my gas boiler be to blame?**
8. **What can I do to help reduce my energy costs?**
9. **What heaters should I use?**
10. **Will insulating my home make a difference?**
11. **How can I dry my clothes without making condensation worse?**
12. **How can I reduce condensation when bathing?**
13. **How can I stop my clothes from getting mouldy in cupboards and wardrobes?**

14. Will blocking my chimney make a difference?
15. Should I keep my kitchen and bathroom doors open or closed?
16. What is the best way to ventilate my home?
17. Can how I cook make a difference?
18. What are the key points to remember to control condensation?
19. What if I need further help?

1. How do I know if it is condensation?

It is not always easy to tell but here are some key differences between condensation and other forms of damp.

Condensation is usually found on north facing walls and in corners, in cupboards and under work surfaces – in fact wherever there is little air movement.

Other kinds of dampness, such as rain or plumbing leaks, usually leave a 'tidemark'.

Condensation can often be characterised by mould growth – mould generally grows on cleaner water so is unlikely to grow on moisture from penetrating or rising damp.

2. What could be causing the damp in my home?

If you are not sure what is causing the damp in your home, start by checking pipes and overflows and under sinks to see if there are any obvious leaks. Have a look outside, too – you may be able to see if there are slates missing from the roof or cracked gutters or rainwater pipes.

If you live in a new or recently modernised house or flat, don't forget that it may not have dried out from the water remaining after the building work. It usually takes 9 to 18 months for this to happen and you may need to use more heat during that time.

3. Why am I getting condensation and mould growth?

Every home gets condensation at some time – usually when lots of moisture and steam are being produced, for instance at bath-times, when a main meal is being cooked or when clothes are being washed. It is quite normal to find your bedroom windows misted up in the morning after a cold night.

Air can only hold a certain amount of water vapour – the warmer it is the more it can hold. If air is cooled by contact with a cold surface such as a mirror, a window or even a wall, the water vapour will turn into droplets of water-condensation. So the warmer you keep your home the less likely you are to get condensation.

4. Why does mould appear?

For mould growth to occur there needs to be a sufficient amount of water available, this is why mould growth often occurs with condensation or dampness. This type of mould looks like “black spots” and is typically found along skirting boards or ceiling edges.

5. Is dampness, condensation and mould bad for my health?

If your home is damp or has lots of condensation, the chances are the house will be a cold house. Living in a cold house will lead to negative health effects. Therefore it is important to keep your house warm.

Mould and fungi can be allergenic. However house dust mites are the most common triggers of asthma rather than mould growth. House dust mites thrive where the amount of ventilation is reduced, warmer indoor temperatures and high humidity. These conditions can also lead to condensation.

6. What can I do to get rid of mould?

To kill and remove mould, wipe down or spray walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash that carries a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 'approval number', and ensure that you follow the instructions for its safe use. These fungicidal washes are often available at local supermarkets. Dry-clean mildewed clothes, and shampoo carpets. Do not try to remove mould by using a brush or vacuum cleaner.

After treatment, redecorate using good-quality fungicidal paint and a fungicidal resistant wall paper paste to help prevent mould recurring. The effect of fungicidal or anti-condensation paint is destroyed if covered with ordinary paint or wallpaper.

The only permanent cure is to reduce the amount of condensation in your home. Remember, the way you use your home affects the amount of condensation you get. This does not mean that you should alter your habits drastically – just bear in mind the following tips:

7. Can my gas boiler be to blame?

It is important that your heating system is checked regularly so that it works efficiently. A gas boiler which is not in good working order can produce more moisture. Ensure you have a current satisfactory gas safety certificate by a Gas Safe Registered Engineer.

8. What can I do to help reduce my energy costs?

You will get less condensation if you keep your home warm most of the time. This is not easy with fuel prices so high, but try to remember the following:

Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated rooms. Try to leave some background heat on through the day in cold weather. Most dwellings take quite a long time to warm up, and it may cost you more if you try to heat it up quickly in the evening. If you don't have heating

in every room, you could keep the doors of unheated rooms open to allow some heat into them.

If you can't afford to spend more on fuel because of high quarterly bills, ask your fuel supplier or your local gas or electricity board about their budget schemes, for example fuel saving stamps, which help to spread the cost of fuel. The Bristol Debt Advice Centre can give you advice on financial worries relating to fuel bills and may be able to clear your fuel debts. Call 0117 954 3544 or email energy@bdac.org.uk for more information.

Also Energy@ Home can provide advice on reducing fuel bills. They can be contacted on **0800 038 5680** or visit www.energyathome.org.uk

9. What heaters should I use?

To add extra heat to rooms without any form of heating, it is better to use electric heaters, for example oil-filled radiators or panel heaters, on a low setting. Try not to use portable bottled gas heaters in homes suffering with condensation as they give out a lot of moisture whilst in use. Contrary to popular belief, it is actually cheaper to heat a room with on-peak electricity than by bottled gas heaters.

If you use bottle gas and paraffin heaters you will need to allow extra ventilation. Flueless heaters of this sort produce more than a pint of water for every pint of fuel they burn. So, using a bottled gas heater for 8 hours would produce around 4 pints of moisture.

Don't use your gas cooker to heat your kitchen as it produces moisture when burning gas. (You might notice your windows misting over).

10. Will insulating my home make a difference?

Condensation forms more easily on cold surfaces in the home, insulation and draught proofing can help keep your home warmer. Loft and wall insulation are the most effective forms of insulation. If you use draught proofing remember that you should not block permanent ventilators or airbricks and do not draught proof kitchen or bathroom windows. You may be eligible for financial assistance for insulation and heating. Call Energy@ Home on **0800 038 5680** for further information or visit www.energyathome.org.uk

11. How can I dry my clothes without making condensation worse?

Drying clothes indoors, particularly on radiators, can increase condensation unless you open a window to allow air to circulate. Up to 9 pints of excess water can be produced by drying your clothes inside. Hang your washing outside to dry if at all possible, or hang it in the bathroom with the door closed and a window slightly open or extractor fan on. Don't be tempted to put it on radiators or in front of a radiant heater.

If you have a tumble dryer which is not vented to the outside you will need to allow more ventilation when you use it.

12. How can I reduce condensation when bathing?

When filling your bath, run the cold water first then add the hot - it will reduce the steam by 90% which leads to condensation.

13. How can I stop my clothes from getting mouldy in cupboards and wardrobes?

Don't overfill cupboards and wardrobes. Always make sure that some air can circulate freely by fitting ventilators in doors and leaving a space at the back of the shelves.

14. Will blocking my chimney make a difference?

Never block these up completely. If you are blocking up a fireplace, fit an air vent to allow ventilation.

15. Should I keep my kitchen and bathroom doors open or closed?

Keep kitchen and bathroom doors shut, particularly when cooking, washing or bathing – otherwise water vapour will spread right through the house and condensation will probably reach other rooms.

16. What is the best way to ventilate my home?

The more moisture produced in your home, the greater are the chances of condensation, unless there is adequate ventilation. Nobody likes draughts, but some ventilation is essential.

Help to reduce condensation that has built up overnight by opening to the first notch a small window downstairs and a small window upstairs. (They should be on opposite sides of the house, or diagonally opposite if you live in a flat). At the same time, open the interior room doors, this will allow drier air to circulate throughout your home. This should be carried out for 30 minutes

each day.

Ventilate your bedroom by leaving a window slightly open at night, or use trickle ventilators if fitted.

Reduce the risk of mildew on clothes and other stored items, by allowing air to circulate round them; Remove "false" wardrobe backs or drill breather holes in them; Place furniture on blocks to allow air to circulate underneath; Keep a small gap between large pieces of furniture and the walls, and where possible place wardrobes and furniture next to internal walls instead of external ones;

Pull shelves away from the backs of wardrobes and cupboards; Never overfill wardrobes and cupboards as it restricts air circulation.

Important note:

Make sure that accessible windows will not cause a security problem - remember to close windows when you go out.

If you have an extractor fan use it when cooking or having a bath /shower to stop the windows getting steamed up and keep it running for a while after you have finished.

17. Can how I cook make a difference?

Don't allow kettles and pans to boil away any longer than is necessary.

Always cook with pan lids on, and turn the heat down once the water has boiled. Only use the minimum amount of water for cooking vegetables.

18. What are the key points to remember to control condensation?

- Try to reduce the amount of moisture you produce
- Improve ventilation in your home
- Try and maintain an adequate temperature throughout your home

19. What if I need further help?

If you are having problems with damp or excessive condensation in your home then you can contact the Housing Standards and Improvement Team for further advice. Please contact the team by telephoning 01225 396444, emailing housing@bathnes.gov.uk or writing to The Housing Standards Team, Bath and North East Somerset Council, PO Box 3343, Bath, BA1 2ZH.

If you rent your property and are still experience issues with damp and mould growth after following this advice for 8 weeks, then please complete and send the below questionnaire via email or post to the above address.

Damp & Mould Questionnaire

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Housing Standards and Improvement Team
PO Box 3343
Bath BA1 2ZH

Housing Services asks that you complete this questionnaire to help you determine if you have a damp or condensation issue in your home and help us assess if we can help. Please complete the questionnaire truthfully.

Do you own or rent your property?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes I own it – please see the FAQ Sheet for advice or seek the advice of an independent specialist. | <input type="checkbox"/> | No , I rent - please complete the questionnaire |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|

If you rent, have you reported any defects to the landlord/agent?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No – You must report any defects or issues with your property in the first instance and give a reasonable timescale for the landlord to complete the works. See FAQ Sheet for more details. |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|--|

If yes, are they investigating the defect?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes – please allow a reasonable timescale for investigation and completion of works. | <input type="checkbox"/> | No - Please fill in details below. |
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Where can the dampness be found?

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What do you think has caused the dampness? (Are there plumbing leaks, issues of disrepair, roof problems, rising damp, drying your clothes inside etc.?)

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Does the property have mould growing inside?

Yes

No

If yes, where is the mould growing and in which rooms?

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Have you used a fungicide to cleanse the mould?

Yes – You may need to repeat the application many times.

No – please read the FAQ Sheet

Do you dry clothes inside the property? (Such as on radiators, over handrails or on clothes horses etc.)

Yes – This will increase the risk of condensation damp. Please read the FAQ Sheet

No – I dry them outside or in a tumble drier.

Have you read the factsheet and followed the instructions for 8 weeks?

Yes – please answer all questions and return the questionnaire

No – please read the factsheet and follow instructions for 8 weeks. If the problems do not improve please answer all questions and return the questionnaire

Does your property have a fixed heating system in each habitable room? E.g. gas central heating or night storage heating

Yes

No – please answer all questions and return the questionnaire straight away.

If no, please explain what type of heating you do have

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If yes, is the system working correctly?

Yes

No – please contact your landlord to ask him to fix the problem and return the questionnaire with all questions answered

Can you open the windows?

- Yes** **No** – You need to be able to ventilate your property. Please address this issue to your landlord / agent. If your landlord does not fix the problem within a reasonable timescale please call 01225 396444 to report the problem and we can investigate.

Do you have trickle vents in the windows or walls?

- Yes** – Please make sure they are unblocked and used **No**

Is there adequate loft insulation?

- Yes** **No or Unknown** – Loft insulation will keep the heat in and help you warm the property. If your landlord does not fix the problem within a reasonable timescale please call 01225 396444 to report the problem and we can investigate

Have you followed the advice in the fact sheet for 8 weeks or more?

- Yes** – Please return the questionnaire **No** – Please follow the advice in the fact sheet for 8 weeks or more. Do not return the questionnaire until you have followed the advice for 8 weeks or more and the situation has not improved

Are there any smoke detectors in your property?

- Yes** **No** – Please ask your landlord to fix smoke alarms. If your landlord does not do so within a reasonable timescale please call 01225 396444 to report the problem and we can investigate

Are there any other problems / disrepair in your property? If yes, please give details of the problems, when you reported the problem to your landlord / agent and what, if anything, has been done about the problem(s). Return the questionnaire to the address above with all questions answered.

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Please fill in details below:

Date:

Your name:

Full address including postcode:

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Telephone numbers & email address:

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The following is essential for the case to proceed:

What is the landlords/agents name:

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Their address:

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Their telephone numbers:

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Please attach any correspondence to or from your landlords or agents or give a written description of what has happened to date.

It is recommended that you follow the advice on minimizing condensation levels in your property for 8 weeks. This will determine if the condensation is due to your lifestyle actions and practices within the home or if there is a defect with the property.

You must always contact your landlord/agent first to inform them of the issues or defects. You must also give them a reasonable timescale to remedy the issues or defects. Ensure this is done formally and records are kept. Where they do not remedy the defects, please return this questionnaire with any evidence.

Housing Standards will always speak to you before we speak to your landlord. You may wish to photocopy this questionnaire if you have been instructed to return it.