Dealing with condensation and damp

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Why it's important to deal with condensation and damp

During the colder months condensation becomes a major problem in many British homes. If left, this moisture can develop into black mould which looks and smells bad and can cause damage to clothes, furniture, books, shoes and decorations as well as causing health problems.

Condensation is caused when warm moist air hits a cold surface such as a window or external wall and condenses, running down the cold surface as water droplets.

It can be a problem in any property no matter how old it is. It is often worse in homes that have been 'modernised' if ventilation and the circulation of air is reduced.

Improving ventilation and air circulation around the home is very important in the prevention of condensation; this allows the air to release its moisture outside your home preventing future problems inside your home.

Did you know?

- **Drying clothes indoors** can add moisture to the air equivalent to **10 to 15 litres (18 to 26 pints)** of water a week

- **Showering, cooking, bathing and washing** can add **15 to 20 litres (26 to 35 pints)** a week

- Just by **breathing**, a family of four can add **30 to 40 litres (53 to 70 pints)** a week

Condensation

Condensation can cause mould to form in your home and lead to it staining/ damaging wallpaper, wall surfaces, window frames, furniture and clothing.

The mould and spores carry a musty smell that is often associated with a damp house.

Black mould is one of the signs of damp from condensation.

Water vapour is generated in your home in many ways but the main causes are:

- steam from cooking and boiling the kettle
- baths and showers
- drying clothes inside on the radiator
- unsuitable or no venting of tumble dryers.

The best way to deal with mould is to remove it from walls using a special fungicidal wash which you can buy from hardware stores and online. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Special paints are also available that will delay the return of the mould, but unless you take steps to reduce condensation it will always grow back.

The major difference between condensation and other forms of damp is that there are easy steps that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of condensation in your home.

Areas prone to condensation

The following areas are particularly prone to condensation:

- cold surfaces such as mirrors, windows and window frames
- kitchens and bathrooms where a lot of steam is created
- outside walls, walls of unheated rooms and cold corners of rooms
- wardrobes/cupboards and behind furniture against an outside wall.

Reducing condensation

There are four things to consider when trying to reduce condensation in your home:

Heating

Condensation is likely to be a problem in homes which are underheated:

- try to keep temperatures in all rooms above 15°C as this will reduce condensation.

Also aim to keep living rooms at 18 to 21°C for a comfortable temperature.

If you're worried about rising energy costs and keeping your home warm, contact Hillingdon Citizens Advice 0808 278 7893 for advice.

Insulation

Insulating your home will help in three ways:

1. Warming surface temperatures of walls, ceilings and windows
2. Helping to keep your home warm and increasing the temperature of your home
3. Reducing heating costs, allowing your home to be heated more cheaply but to a higher level.

Ventilation

Condensation will occur less if you allow air to circulate freely. Make sure air vents and air bricks are not covered or obstructed.

Reduce the moisture

Condensation in the home occurs when there is too much moisture in the air. Take all appropriate steps to reduce the amount of moisture in the air by using the tips in the following checklists.

Condensation prevention checklist

General home checklist

- [ ] In colder weather try and keep temperatures between 18 and 21˚C in main living areas whilst indoors.
- [ ] Don't block air bricks or air vents.
- [ ] To kill and remove mould, wipe down walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash which carries a Health and Safety Executive approval number.
- [ ] Dry washing outside when possible.
- [ ] Don't dry clothes on radiators. This will make your boiler work harder to heat your house and cost almost as much as using a tumble dryer, whilst creating a lot of condensation in your home.
- [ ] If you have to dry clothing indoors, and don't have a tumble dryer, place clothes on a drying rack in a sunny room where a window can be opened slightly.
- [ ] No drying rack? Put your clothes on hangers and hang them from a curtain pole above a slightly opened window; this can also reduce the need for ironing.

In the living room

- [ ] Open window trickle vents during the day or when going out, or open windows for at least 10 minutes every day.
- [ ] Lay thick carpet with a good thermal underlay.
- [ ] Hang thick, heavy lined curtains during the winter.

In the kitchen

- [ ] Close internal doors whilst cooking and open windows.
- [ ] Put lids on pans (this also reduces boiling times and helps save you money).
- [ ] Use an extractor fan if you have one.
- [ ] Only boil as much water as you need in a kettle to reduce steam.

In the bathroom

- [ ] Open windows whilst bathing/washing and leave them open for about 20 minutes after, if it's safe to do so.
- [ ] Use an extractor fan if you have one.
- [ ] When running a bath put the cold water in first; this results in significantly less condensation.
- [ ] Take shorter showers.
- [ ] Wipe down windows/mirrors/tiles/shower doors with a window squeegee and mop up the moisture with a super absorbent cloth which can be wrung out into your sink.
- [ ] Don't leave wet towels lying around.
- [ ] Try drying yourself with a smaller towel and wringing it out, wrapping yourself in a bigger towel or dressing gown for warmth. Microfibre towels are great for this as they absorb more water and dry quickly.

In the bedroom

- [ ] Wipe down windows with a window squeegee and wring it out in your sink.
- [ ] Open window trickle vents during the day or when going out, or open windows for at least 10 minutes every day.
- [ ] Don't put furniture, including beds, against any outside walls and try and leave a gap between the wall and furniture to allow airflow.
- [ ] Lay thick carpet with a good thermal underlay.
- [ ] Hang thick, heavy lined curtains during the winter.

When decorating

- [ ] When wallpapering, use a paste containing a fungicide to prevent further mould growth.
- [ ] Use thermal lining paper under wallpaper when decorating.
- [ ] Use mould resistant paint on areas prone to mould, such as the ceiling above windows.

Damp

Rising damp and penetrating damp are less common than condensation.

Rising damp

Rising damp is caused by a failed damp proof course. This allows moisture in the ground to rise up through the ground floor walls of your home, sometimes to a height of one metre.

You can usually identify rising damp by a 'tide mark' along the top of the damp area, caused by salt deposits.

Penetrating damp

Penetrating damp is classed as any water that finds its way inside your home from the outside. It can occur at all levels of the building but is usually higher up.

Water can get into your home through defects in roofs, gutters, doors, windows, pointing or outside wall coverings.

Typical signs of penetrating damp in your home are:

- growing areas of damp on walls or ceilings
- wet and crumbly plaster
- signs of spores or mildew and/or staining
- drips and puddles.

If you think you have damp issues, seek advice

Hillingdon Council tenants and leaseholders should visit www.hillingdon.gov.uk/requestrepair, and select 'mould, condensation and damp'. Private sector tenants should contact their landlord or managing agent.

Other residents can use services such as Checkatrade and Which? Trusted Trader to find accredited companies.

Damp and your home

Key areas to maintain

Chimney flashing
Check it is not damaged.

Gutters
Make sure they are free flowing and not clogged up with leaves etc.

Roof tiles/ slates
Ensure slipped or missing tiles/slates are replaced.

Soil vent pipe/ stack
Ensure there are no leaks.

Air bricks
Don't block these up or let plants cover them.

Damp proof course
Make sure no rubble or soil is piled against it.

Your health

As well as damaging your home, persistent condensation and damp and the resulting mould can lead to health issues, including breathing problems. See your pharmacist or GP for advice.

For more information visit www.nhs.uk

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