

# Damp & Mould; Causes and Effects



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# Current UK situation

- Damp and mould has always been an issue in the UK due to our cold, damp climate and aging housing stock.
- Following the death of two year old Awaab Ishak caused by damp and mould in his home, the government has brought in new legislation and guidance on damp and mould:
- [Damp and mould: understanding and addressing the health risks for rented housing providers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

# Renters (Reform) Bill and Social Housing Regulation Act

- New requirements for landlords to address hazards such as damp and mould in social homes.
- New powers for the Housing Ombudsman
- Social housing residents can now complain directly to the Ombudsman
- Will apply the Decent Homes Standard to private rented homes
- Introduce new professionalisation standards that will require senior housing staff to hold, or work towards, recognised housing management qualifications
- New “private rented property portal” and give all private tenants access to an ombudsman if their landlord fails to resolve legitimate complaints



# What causes damp?

- The most common form of damp is condensation. This is often caused by a lack of ventilation and heating.
- The colder the air temperature is, the less moisture it can hold. Water condenses on cold surfaces such as windows and the bottom corners of walls.
- The temperature at which water is no longer able to exist as a gas and instead condenses to liquid water, depends upon the humidity inside the dwelling.
- Black mould is almost always associated with condensation, but is also associated with penetrating damp.

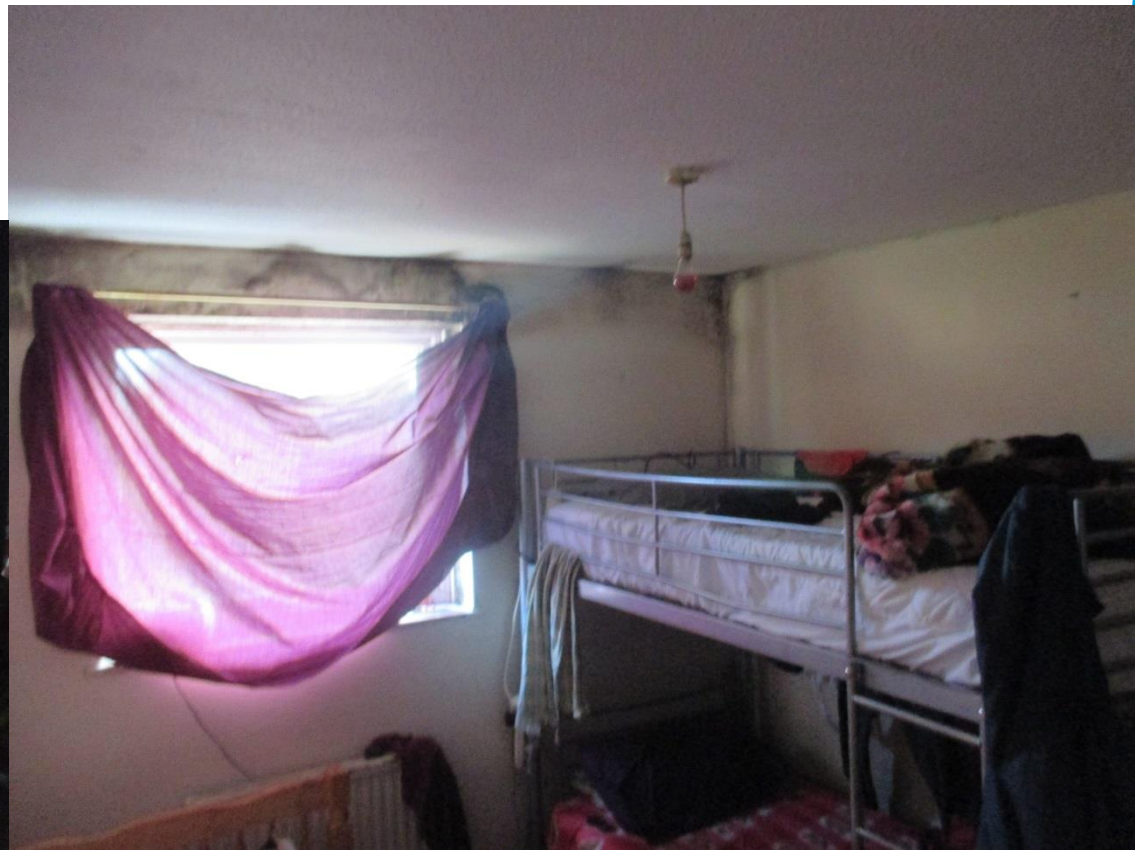
# Structural causes of Condensation

- Lack of suitable and/or affordable heating system
  - Lack of insulation; more cold surfaces
- Lack of ventilation; moisture laden air has nowhere to escape to
  - Not maintaining extract fans



# Lifestyle causes of Condensation

- Not using heating system
  - Not opening windows, not using extract fans or trickle vents
- Overcrowding; more people = more moisture produced from breathing, sweating, cooking, showering, etc.



# Rising Damp



- True rising damp is very rare and occurs in older properties where there is either no damp proof membrane (DPM) in the foundation of the property, or it has become damaged.
- Moisture from the earth then travels up via microscopic pores in the masonry to around 1 metre in height.
- A **white tide line** as a result of **mortar salts** precipitating out of solution is often one of the defining characteristics of rising damp.

# Penetrating Damp



- Penetrating damp can be caused by rain coming in from the outside or from internal waterpipes leaking.
- Leaking toilets, showers, baths, pipework, boilers, etc, can then cause damage to woodwork, ceilings, plaster.
- Defective external guttering can allow water to pour down walls, soaking the masonry, reducing thermal efficiency and making condensation on the inside more likely.





Penetrating damp  
can lead to  
electrical  
hazards...



# Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

- When we receive a complaint about a hazard in a property, such as damp and mould, we use HHSRS to assess the situation and score the hazard. This then informs what course of action we take next.
- The government guidance on HHSRS for landlords is found here:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/9425/150940.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/9425/150940.pdf)



# Health effects

- Damp and mould mainly affect the airways and lungs, but they can also affect the eyes and skin. The respiratory effects of damp and mould can cause serious illness and, in the most severe cases, death.
- Excessive moisture promotes the growth of fungi, dust mites, bacteria & viruses. These microorganisms produce spores and other toxins that act as irritants and allergens.
- Respiratory symptoms include:
  - cough, wheeze and shortness of breath
  - increased risk of airway infections

# Respiratory Health Effects

More severe respiratory symptoms include:

- Rhinitis; an allergic condition causing nasal congestion, runny nose, sneezing and itching.
- Asthma
- Conditions involving inflammation of the airways such as:
  - bronchitis,
  - hypersensitivity pneumonitis
  - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

# Other Health Effects

- Irritation of the eye potentially leading to allergic conjunctivitis
- Eczema, and other patches of itchy skin or skin rashes
- Other fungal infections (including, but not exclusively those of the skin), especially in people with weakened immune systems
- The more serious the damp and mould problem and **the longer it is left untreated**, the worse the health impacts and risks are likely to be.

# Mental Health Effects

- Depressing living conditions
- Belongings ruined by mould growth
- Anxiety related to physical health impacts
- Frustration with poor advice and/or being blamed for damp and mould
- Social isolation as a result of not wanting visitors in the home
- Delays in response or repairs following reporting of damp and mould and/or poor quality of repairs

# Groups most at risk of harm

- People with pre-existing health conditions or allergies
- People with a weakened immune system, or taking medications that suppress their immune system
- People with a mental health condition
- Pregnant women, their unborn babies and women who have recently given birth
- Children and young people
- Older people
- The bedbound, housebound or have mobility problems

# Responding to reports of damp and mould

All landlords should:

- Respond sensitively and urgently to identify the severity of any damp and mould and risks to tenants.
- Tackle the underlying issue promptly and act with urgency on concerns around tenant health.
- Ensure tenants are kept informed on steps to address damp and mould.
- Document and photograph the location of the mould.
- Remove mould using qualified professionals where appropriate.
- Identify and tackle the underlying cause(s) including building deficiencies, inadequate ventilation, and condensation – simply removing surface mould does not prevent re-appearance.
- Undertake timely inspection following remedial work to ensure the underlying issue has been addressed, undertaking further investigation and intervention for any re-appearance.



# Taking a proactive approach to damp and mould

All landlords should:

- Have clear processes to document, manage and act on reports of damp and mould.
- Proactively undertake the necessary interventions to ventilation, energy efficiency and building deficiencies before damp and mould occurs.
- Understand that some tenants may struggle to heat their homes, making damp and mould more likely to occur, wherein they should consider what support they can provide or signpost tenants to.
- Support tenants to understand what they can do, where appropriate, to reduce damp and mould, but never instead of addressing the underlying cause.
- Build relationships with health and social care and other frontline professionals supporting tenants, to ensure that every opportunity to identify tenants living in homes with damp and mould is utilised, "making every contact count".



# Taking a proactive approach to damp and mould

All landlords should:

- Ensure staff and external contractors are aware of the health risks of damp and mould and the need to address the underlying causes and not just remove visible mould.
- Be aware of any processes for reporting and addressing damp and mould, and are sensitive to tenants' circumstances and vulnerabilities.
- Build relationships with tenants, ensuring they feel encouraged to report damp and mould.



# Useful resources

- Guide to managing condensation mould in tenants' homes (AMIP):
  - <https://www.echelonip.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Echelon-Group-Guide-to-Condensation-Mould.pdf>
- Cambridge City Council's damp and mould website:
  - <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/reduce-condensation-and-prevent-mould-in-your-home>
- Spotlight on damp and mould: it's not lifestyle, October 2021, Housing Ombudsman Service:
  - <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf>
- Cold weather advice and resources:
  - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-warm-keep-well-leaflet-gives-advice-on-staying-healthy-in-cold-weather>
- National Energy Action (NEA) courses:
  - <https://www.nea.org.uk/training/course-outlines/>
- NEA has developed a series of energy advice information leaflets:
  - <https://www.nea.org.uk/get-help/resources/>

# Energy support for households

- **Warm Home Discount Scheme:** a one-off discount on electricity bills between October 2022 and March 2023.
- **Winter Fuel Payment:** people born before 26 September 1956 may get between £250 and £600 to help pay their heating bills. Running for winter 2023/2024.
- **Household Support Fund;** must live in Cambridgeshire, earn below a certain amount, have less than £16,000 in money, savings and investments and have not applied in last 3 months.
- <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/household-support-fund>
- **Energy bill help**
- <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/energy-bill-help>