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Projects

Preventing and Dealing with Condensation, Mould and Damp in the Home

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Damp and mould affects all kinds of homes, from modern flats to traditional terraced houses and new-build detached estates, but when it comes to Stepping Stone Projects customers, condensation is usually its main cause.

What is condensation, mould and damp?

Condensation

Condensation occurs when moisture or water in the air collects on a colder surface. We will all notice a little bit of condensation in our homes when, for instance, our windows or bathroom mirrors get 'steamed up' after a shower.

While a little condensation is usually nothing to worry about, too much for too long can lead to damp and mould.

Mould

Mould first appears as little black dots in places like corners of the windows or behind furniture or anywhere that water and moisture can collect. Mould can affect people's health, so it's important to take action if signs of mould are seen in homes.

Damp

Damp looks like a wet patch or tide mark on a wall or ceiling and can appear if condensation is ignored for a long time. It can also give off a musty, mouldy smell. When it's left untreated, damp can cause structural problems over a long period of time, so it's also important to take action if signs of damp are seen in homes.

What can be done to prevent condensation?

If your windows are getting steamy or your windowsills are wet then there's too much moisture in the air. Here are some ways to prevent and reduce condensation and mould in your home:

- When cooking, close your kitchen door and cover pots and pans with a lid (it's also more fuel-efficient) so any steam is contained. Open a window or put an extractor fan on so steam can escape.
- When showering or bathing, close the bathroom door to contain any steam and open a window or put an extractor fan on so steam can escape.
- When you've finished showering, bathing, washing or cooking drain the warm water from your sink, bath or pots and pans as soon as it's no longer needed. This reduces the time the time water has to evaporate which, in turn, saturates the air.

- Dry your laundry outside on a washing line, portable clothes dryer or in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open or the extractor fan on so moisture can escape.
- Warm rooms are less likely to be affected by condensation, as are rooms at similar temperatures if you maintain them with your central heating thermostat at 19-22°C in living rooms, kitchens and bathrooms, and 16-20°C in bedrooms.
- If any rooms in your home aren't being heated, keep the doors and windows slightly open to allow air currents to circulate and reduce the likelihood of condensation.
- Open your windows regularly for a short period to 'air the place' and leave any wall and window vents open to allow moisture to escape.
- Try to keep a small window open when someone is in the room or, better still, open the window trickle ventilators if you have them (If you're not sure if you have them fitted, look on or around your windows for a slim, sliding, slotted-type plastic device or ask your Supported Housing Worker/Housing Management Officer or your landlord). When we open a window widely, steam and condensation will escape but so will warmth so this is where the trickle ventilator or vent comes into its own. It does exactly what it says and allows air to trickle into your house at a reasonable rate so that you will not feel a cold draught, your security will not be compromised and you should have a balanced environment.
- Whenever the weather's cold, keep your heating on a 'low' setting all day - warm rooms reduce condensation.
- Try not to have furniture, wardrobes, cupboards, etc pushed up against or in corners with any (colder) external walls.
- Remove clutter from rooms, wardrobes and cupboards so air can flow through your home and moisture isn't trapped.
- Regularly wipe down damp windows, windowsills and walls with a squeegee to prevent condensation build-up and wring it out down the sink.
- If you must use a tumble-dryer, make sure the room it's in is well ventilated, with an open window, extractor fan or dehumidifier, so any moisture can escape.
- Never use paraffin and portable bottled gas heaters as these heaters produce a lot of moisture in the air. They can also be dangerous to use in unventilated spaces and present an increased risk of fire or tripping.
- Airtight rooms, windows and buildings (and enclosed bathrooms without windows) require more active, powered ventilation, eg extractor fans. Keep the fan vents open and clean and do not block or turn them off when using the room.

How can you treat mould?

Mould can be removed by scrubbing with a mould-specific, fungicidal cleaning product from your local store or supermarket, which should display a Health and Safety Executive approval number. Follow the manufacturer's instructions precisely.

Please don't use a vacuum cleaner, bleach or washing up liquid on mould - none of these measures will be fully effective.

When removing mould you should wear protective gloves and a face mask.

Once the mould's removed, it may be necessary to redecorate using a good quality anti-mould paint. Please note: this paint is ineffective if overlaid on ordinary paints or wallpaper.

Any mildewed clothes, bedding and removable soft furnishings should be dry-cleaned, ideally, if not replaced, while carpets should be shampooed.

If You've Tried to Reduce Condensation, But Are Still Having Problems

- Sometimes, damp and mould is due to a problem with the property. If you have tried our tips but it's making no difference, please let us or your landlord know. We or your landlord may need to carry out some maintenance. Speak to your Supported Housing Worker/Housing Management Officer or contact your landlord.
- We'll always (and so should your landlord) ask what you've done to try and manage the issue yourself. This helps us (and your landlord) to understand and better diagnose what is going on.
- Understanding what's causing damp or mould in your home isn't always easy. Damp or mould can be due to a combination of factors and therefore we or your landlord may need to send a surveyor or specialist contractor to your home to inspect the issue.
- The measures we can take to help you tackle the problem include washing down walls, repairing leaks, installing ventilation and providing dehumidifiers and/or temporary heaters. It may take several visits and inspections to diagnose and treat the issue.
- If the issue appears to be with the structure of the building, a specialist surveyor should inspect your home to assess whether any adaptations are required. Damp can sometimes only be eliminated with prolonged treatment. Unfortunately, this outcome can lead to people wrongly feeling the issue hasn't been taken seriously but please rest assured that it's also very much in our or your landlord's interest as it is in yours that damp is treated as soon as possible.