



CONDENSATION IN PRIVATE RENTED PROPERTIES

What is Condensation?

Condensation is a very common problem in many homes and primarily occurs as a result of a lack of adequate heating, ventilation and insulation. Condensation forms when moisture produced from normal everyday tasks, e.g. cooking, bathing, drying clothes etc., comes into contact with a cold / cooler surface. At these surfaces, the air holds less moisture which leads to it being deposited. Condensation usually becomes noticeable when black mould starts to appear on surfaces such as window frames, walls and behind cupboards / wardrobes, and it is generally worse during colder months of the year.

Common signs of condensation are shown in the photographs below.



The mould spores associated with condensation dampness are airborne allergens and can cause health problems if and when a person is exposed to high levels of them over a prolonged period of time. Children under the age of 14 are the most vulnerable to these mould spores.

Treatment

To kill and remove black mould, affected areas should be wiped down using a fungicidal wash (available from most DIY or hardware stores) or a diluted bleach solution. Mould should NOT be disturbed by brushing or vacuum cleaning as this can cause it to spread. It is strongly recommended that a disposable respiratory mask is worn, also available from more DIY and hardware stores, when removing any mould growth. After removing black mould, a good quality fungicidal paint can be used to redecorate the affected areas.

A checklist for the removal of mould (WHO, 2009) can be found below:

- ✓ Have a big plastic bag ready to take away mildewed clothes, curtains, rugs and carpets for cleaning. Consider replacing a mattress or soft toy that smells and feels damp.
- ✓ The process of cleaning will release mould spores into the air. Open any windows but close doors tightly to help prevent the spores being spread to other areas of the house. Leave the windows open during and after the clean-up activity.
- ✓ Prepare a bucket of water, some mild detergent, such as washing up liquid or a soap used for hand-washing clothes, and some rags that can be thrown away after removing the mould.
- ✓ Carefully wipe the mould off the wall surface with the soapy rag. Take a dry rag to wipe down and remove the moisture following the cleaning process. Put the rags in a plastic bag prior to disposal.
- ✓ After mould removal, all surfaces in the room should be thoroughly cleaned either by wet wiping or by vacuum cleaning preferably with a HEPA filter¹ to remove spores that have spread during mould removal.

Prevention

Preventing the build-up of condensation is essential for treating it in the long term. The tips below should be followed as part of your everyday lifestyle to ensure that condensation is kept to a minimum.

- Ventilate your property at regular intervals, preferably naturally, by keeping windows ajar whenever you are in (including throughout the night). Keeping trickle vents open if you have them is also advisable.
- When in use, ventilate your bathroom and kitchen by opening a window and using a mechanical extractor fan if possible. Also ensure that bathroom and kitchen doors are fully closed when in use to prevent moisture spreading throughout your property.
- When running a bath, run the cold tap first then the hot to reduce the amount of steam created.
- When cooking, ensure lids are used on pots and pans to prevent excess steam entering the air.
- Dry your clothes outside whenever possible. Where this is not possible, dry clothes on a maiden in a room with the heating on, windows open and door closed. Do not dry clothes on radiators or heaters as this will create additional moisture.

- Heat your property at regular intervals. In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm enough to avoid condensation is to keep low background heating on all day.
- Try to avoid using paraffin heaters or portable flueless bottled gas heaters wherever possible as these types of heaters put vast amounts of moisture into the air.
- Use a dehumidifier to collect excess moisture within the air.
- Pull furniture and wardrobes away from walls to allow air to circulate.
- Ensure your property is insulated sufficiently. This will be the responsibility of your landlord. Advice on insulation and energy efficiency can be found at: <http://www.stockport.gov.uk/services/housing/homeowners/energyefficiency>.