

# Keeping your home free from condensation, mould and fungus

Condensation can cause black mould on walls, furniture and fabrics. The mould looks bad and can even damage your health – medical research has found links between mould, house dust mites and illness of the throat and lungs. The damp left by condensation will also damage plasterwork and timber windows.

## What is condensation and what causes it?

Everyday things like cooking, washing, bathing and even breathing cause moisture, which is released into the air. The air can only hold a certain amount of water vapour - the warmer it is, the more it can hold. If this is cooled by contact with a cold surface such as mirror, a window or even a wall, the water vapour will turn into droplets of water - condensation. This is what happens when the mirrors mist up in the bathroom.

## What does condensation look like?

Every home gets condensation at some time - usually when lots of moisture and steam are being produced, such as bath times, when cooking meals or washing clothes.

Fish tanks and indoor plants can also give rise to large quantities of moisture in the air.

It is quite normal to find your bedroom windows misted up in the morning after a cold night. This does not mean there is a serious condensation problem.

If your home never seems to be free from condensation, or you have mould growth as well, read on.

## What can you do to reduce it?

### 1. Produce less moisture

- Dry your washing outside whenever you can. You can also hang it in the bathroom, but keep the door closed and the window wide open.
- Never use portable gas bottles or paraffin (flueless) heaters.
- Permanently vent your tumble drier to the outside of your home, using a suitable kit recommended by the manufacturer.
- While cooking, always cover pans and don't leave kettles boiling.

### 2. Ventilate well to remove moisture

- When a room is in use, keep a small window and/or trickle vent open.
- Ventilate bathrooms and kitchens.

- Keep bathroom and kitchen doors closed even if they have extractor fans.
- Ventilate cupboards and wardrobes – do not overfill wardrobes – let the air circulate freely inside. For the same reason, cut holes in the back panel of the wardrobe and move it 50mm away from the surrounding wall. If possible, locate wardrobes against internal partition walls.

### 3. Insulate and heat your home

- Keep your home warm with insulation, draught-proofing and heating: this reduces the risk of condensation.
- A constant, low-level form of heating provides the most economical form of heat and reduces the likelihood of condensation.

### How to help yourself

- Treat and remove the mould – there are various products on the market that will help such as fungicidal products available in DIY stores.
- Wipe down windows, frames and other affected areas with a fungicidal (mould-killing wash) that carried a Health and Safety Executive 'approval number'. Make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions. Dry-clean mildewed clothes and shampoo mouldy carpets.
- After treating mould-affected areas, redecorate using a good-quality fungicidal paint. Where possible remove lining paper and wallpaper, treat the plaster and then paint or paper the area again.

### Tackling fungus

Some of our tenants contact us because they have noticed grey or black jelly-like substances where there is standing water, and are concerned about the quality of their water supply.

These substances are due to airborne fungal spores are not connected with the quality of the water supply. Although these growths can look very unpleasant they are harmless and are not a risk to health.

#### Where?

- On the end of cold water taps (usually kitchen or bathroom)
- In washing machines (particularly around the powder drawer)
- In toilet cisterns and bowls
- In shower heads
- Around tiles in bathrooms/shower rooms
- On shower curtains or towels (often appears as spots or staining)
- In waste traps connected to sinks

#### What to do

The main way to minimise the problem is to improve ventilation. The actual growth can be physically removed. To help reduce the chances of re-growth, remove any limescale which provides a rough surface for the organisms to latch onto. Cleaning the affected area with diluted bleach or sodium bicarbonate solution will aid the removal of these growths.

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