

### Introduction

Providing you with a safe home, free of damp and mould, is a key priority for us. This factsheet explains why this is important, what you can do to help and what we will do as your landlord.

As your landlord we must ensure, by law, that your home is free from serious hazards, including damp and mould, and that your home is 'fit for habitation.' We must treat cases of damp and mould with the utmost seriousness and act promptly to protect the health of our residents.

### What is damp and mould?

Damp occurs from excess moisture in a building and there are four main types that could affect your home:

#### 1. Rising damp

Caused by water from the ground rising into the home by penetrating or bypassing a defective damp proof course (DPC). Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms, up to a height of 12 to 18 inches (300mm to 450mm) and occurs in older properties. It remains visible all year round (usually as a 'tide mark' low down on the wall) but is more noticeable in winter. If left untreated it will lead to crumbling wall plaster in that area and lifting wallpaper.

#### 2. Penetrating dampness

This type of dampness will only occur on external walls. It will only appear because of a defect outside the home, such as leaking eaves gutters or down pipes, which permits water to pass from the outside to the inside. This type of dampness is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch.

#### 3. Defective plumbing

Leaks from water and waste pipes, especially in bathrooms and kitchens, are common. They can affect both internal and external walls and ceilings. The area looks and feels damp to the touch and remains damp whatever the weather conditions outside. A quick examination of the water (and waste) pipes serving the kitchen and bathroom will usually find the problem.

#### 4. Condensation

This is the most common cause of dampness and occurs when water moisture from inside the dwelling meeting a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The water drops (condensation) may soak into the wallpaper or paintwork or even plasterwork and attract black mould to grow on its surface. Condensation occurs during the colder months, whether it is rainy or dry outside, and thrives in corners and north facing walls, on, or near windows; also, in areas of little air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially if pushed up against external walls. Black-spot mould is frequently seen on this type of dampness.

Mould is a type of fungus that grows in damp and humid conditions. Depending on how serious it is, it can vary in appearance.

There are thousands of mould species although the most common seen in UK homes is black mould. Black mould is a typical indication of too much moisture in the air and poor ventilation and thrives on cold surfaces, particularly bathroom ceilings and windowsills. As it starts to produce spores it continues to reproduce and grow until treated. These spores are allergens, which mean they can cause various allergic reactions.

## Damp, mould and condensation.

Black-spot mould will rarely be seen on rising damp (because this type of dampness carries with it ground salts which are poisonous to black mould), penetrating dampness (because the area is usually too wet and the dampness contains salts, picked up from the wall it has just passed through, which are poisonous to black mould) or defective plumbing (because the area is usually too wet and the chemicals in a waste water leak will be poisonous to mould).

### The risks

Damp and mould can cause significant problems for your home and your health.

Structurally, when moisture settles, it can weaken the strength of any supporting timber frame. Internally, it can cause plaster and paint to deteriorate, wallpaper to loosen and unsightly staining on walls and floors. It also looks unsightly and produces an unpleasant, earthy smell.

In terms of your health, the NHS advise that contact with mould spores can leave you more susceptible to developing a range of different health conditions. Inhaling or touching them can lead to respiratory difficulties, infection, and skin conditions such as rashes. It can also impact your mental health as the stress of living in a mouldy home can be high because of the damage it can cause to possessions, its unattractive appearance and smell and the concerns regarding the impact on your health.

The NHS classifies the following individuals as being at more risk than others from the adverse effects of damp and mould:

- Babies and children.
- Elderly people.
- Those with existing skin problems such as eczema.
- Those with respiratory problems, such as allergies and asthma.
- Those with a weakened immune system, such as those having chemotherapy.

It is important that you tell us about any damp and mould growth so that we can help you.

### What we will do

Our priority will always be to ensure we provide you with a safe and healthy home. We will therefore work with you by:

- Being pro-active in our identification of damp and mould through maintenance inspections.
- Encouraging an open reporting process.
- Identifying the underlying cause of the damp.
- Taking responsibility with regular communication and support until we rectify the damp or mould.
- Keeping records of all reports of damp and mould concerns.
- Assessing adjacent properties to determine whether they are the cause or are themselves affected.
- Documenting control measures introduced to prevent and control the risk.

## Damp, mould and condensation.

- Appointing competent persons to undertake any remedial measures.
- Re-inspecting a home at least 6 weeks after remedial work is complete, to ensure the damp and mould has not reappeared. If damp and mould has reappeared, we will conduct further investigation and intervention.
- Providing an effective means that allows you to raise a complaint with regards to our handling of a reported damp and mould concern.

We will also ensure that:

- We respect any report you make relating to a damp and mould concern and respond fairly and proactively.
- Trained staff can identify and respond to early reports or signs of damp and mould.
- We take prompt and effective action following a property inspection and investigation.
- We implement all reasonable remedial repair solutions and improvements to eradicate issues leading to damp.
- We protect the fabric of your home from deterioration and damage resulting from damp and condensation.

### What you can do

We would ask that you regularly check for signs of damp and mould and **inform us immediately should you have any concerns relating to rising or penetrating damp or dampness caused by leaks.**

If you are concerned about condensation there are steps you can take to help alleviate the problem. Cooking, washing, drying clothes indoors, even breathing, all produce water vapour which produces tiny drops of water (or condensation) and this settles on colder surfaces such as walls, windows, and ceilings. The 'amount' of condensation in a home depends upon the amount of water vapour produced and how cold or warm the property is.

Condensation is less likely in the warmer months or when your home is warm and ventilated. Usually, it appears as the outside temperature begins to fall and the first indication is water vapour condensing on windows and other cold surfaces. The second indication is black mould patches growing on surfaces.

The first tip to manage condensation is to try and strike a balance between warmth and ventilation. You may think opening windows loses heat, but what you are doing is allowing warm moisture-laden air to escape and cool dry air to enter your home. Dry cool air is cheaper to heat than warm moist air, resulting in a healthier living environment.

## Damp, mould and condensation.

To reduce condensation and minimise the chances of black mould growth please follow the advice below:

### Produce less moisture:

- Cover pans when cooking.
- Dry clothes outdoors in warm weather (if you cannot dry your clothes outside use the bathroom or kitchen where you may have an extractor fan to help the moisture escape).
- Ventilate tumble driers to the outside.
- Do not use paraffin or liquid petroleum ('bottled') gas heaters. They produce masses of water vapour and are expensive to run.

### Ventilate to remove moisture:

- Always use your extractor fan or open a window when the kitchen and/or bathroom are in use and close other internal doors to prevent moisture-laden air from spreading to other parts of the dwelling.
- Continue to ventilate for a time after a shower, a bath or cooking.
- Keep furniture pulled away from walls and open cupboard/wardrobe doors to allow for ventilation.
- Always keep window trickle vents open.
- Open bedroom windows, ideally for up to an hour, when you get up in the morning and throw back the sheets or duvets to air the bed and bedding.
- Clear windowsills of clutter that will impede window opening.

### Wipe away excess moisture:

- Always remove by wiping the condensation that has formed from windows (and windowsills if appropriate) and bathroom surfaces after sleeping, cooking, bathing/showering.

### Keep your home adequately heated:

- If possible, keep low background heat on all day.

### If black mould starts to form:

- At the first signs you should attempt to remove it using a fungicidal wash which carries a Health and Safety Executive 'approval number.'
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully and always use rubbers gloves and wear glasses. Dry-clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets. Disturbing mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning can increase the risk of respiratory problems.

### For more information

If you have any concerns relating to damp and mould within your home, please contact our property maintenance team. By emailing [repairs@lacehousing.org](mailto:repairs@lacehousing.org) or telephone 01522 514444 between 9am and 1pm.