



Controlling condensation and mould

Information for Council tenants



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What is condensation?

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If air gets cold, it cannot hold all the moisture produced by everyday activities and some of this moisture appears as tiny droplets of water, most noticeable on windows on a cold morning. This is condensation. It can also be seen on mirrors when you have a bath or shower, and on cold surfaces such as tiles or cold walls. Condensation occurs in cold weather, even when the weather is dry. It doesn't leave a 'tidemark' round its edges on walls. If there is a 'tidemark', this dampness might have another cause, such as water leaking into your home from a plumbing fault, loose roof tiles or rising damp. Look for condensation in your home. It can appear on or near windows, in corners and, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. Condensation forms on cold surfaces and places where there is little movement of air.

Problems that can be caused by excessive condensation

Dampness caused by excessive condensation can lead to mould growth on walls and furniture, mildew on clothes and other fabrics and the rotting of any wooden window frames in your home. Also, damp humid conditions provide an environment in which house dust mites can easily multiply. The presence of mould and dust mites can make existing respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis worse. This is especially dangerous for some groups of people.

People most at risk of health issues from damp and mould

Damp and mould can pose a risk to anyone's health and should always be acted on quickly.

It is extremely important that damp and mould is addressed urgently if anyone in your household is in a group likely to be more vulnerable to significant health impacts:

- people with a pre-existing health condition (for example allergies, asthma, COPD, cystic fibrosis, other lung diseases and cardiovascular disease) who are at risk of their condition worsening and have a higher risk of developing fungal infections and/or additional allergies
- people of all ages who have a weakened immune system, such as people who have cancer or are undergoing chemotherapy, people who have had a transplant, or other people who are taking medications that suppress their immune system
- people living with a mental health condition
- pregnant women, their unborn babies and women who have recently given birth, who may have weakened immune systems
- children and young people whose organs are still developing and are therefore more likely to suffer from physical conditions such as respiratory problems
- children and young people who are at risk of worsening mental health
- older people
- people who are bedbound, housebound or have mobility problems making it more difficult for them to get out of a home with damp and mould and into fresh air

People who fall into more than one of these categories are likely to be particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of damp and mould.

Dacorum Borough Council will not delay action to await medical evidence or opinion before we investigate your report of damp and mould.

First steps against condensation

You will need to take proper steps to deal with condensation, but meanwhile there are some simple things you should do straight away.

- ✓ Dry your windows and windowsills every morning, as well as surfaces in the kitchen or bathroom that have become wet.
- ✓ Squeeze out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.



First steps against mould growth

First treat the mould already in your home, then deal with the basic problem of condensation to stop mould reappearing.

To kill and remove mould, wipe down or spray walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash that carries a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 'approval number', and ensure that you follow the instructions for its safe use. These fungicidal washes are often available at local supermarkets. Dry-clean mildewed clothes, and shampoo carpets. Do not try to remove mould by using a brush or vacuum cleaner. After treatment, redecorate using good-quality fungicidal paint. If you hang wallpaper, use a fungicidal resistant paste to help prevent mould recurring. The effect of fungicidal or anti-condensation paint is destroyed if covered with ordinary paint or wallpaper.

Please remember: the only lasting cure for severe mould is to get rid of the dampness.

What causes condensation?

There are four main factors that cause condensation:

1. Too much moisture being produced in your home
2. Not enough ventilation
3. Cold surfaces
4. The temperature of your home

Let's look at all of these factors to find a cure for your condensation problem.

1. Too much moisture being produced in your home

Our everyday activities add extra moisture to the air inside our homes. Even our breathing adds some moisture. One person asleep adds ½ pint of water to the air overnight and at twice that rate when active during the day.

To give you some idea of how much extra water this could be every day, here are a few examples:

2 people at home for 16 hours	3 pints
A bath or shower	2 pints
Drying clothes indoors	9 pints
Cooking and use of a kettle	6 pints
Washing dishes	2 pints
Total moisture added in one day	22 pints

If your home isn't warm with free movement of air, this moisture will condense on cold surfaces and lead to a mould problem. This is different from damp and mould caused by a problem with the structure of your home, which should always be reported as a repair.

What can you do

- ✓ Hang your washing outside to dry if at all possible, or hang it in the bathroom with the door closed and a window slightly open or extractor fan on.
(Don't be tempted to put it on radiators or in front of a radiant heater.)
- ✓ If you use a tumble drier, make sure it is vented to the outside or that it is of the condensing type.
- ✓ Always cook with pan lids on, and turn the heat down once the water has boiled. Only use the minimum amount of water for cooking vegetables.
- ✓ Only fill your kettle with the amount of water you need and switch it off as soon as it starts to boil.
- ✓ When filling your bath, run the cold water first then add the hot - it will reduce the steam by 90% which leads to condensation.

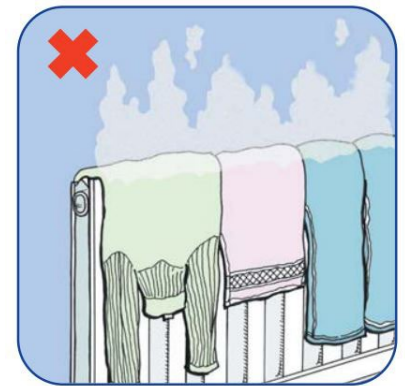
Things to avoid

- ✗ Don't use bottled gas heaters; they produce a lot of moisture and are a fire hazard.
- ✗ If you have a gas cooker, never use it to heat your kitchen as it produces moisture when burning gas. (You might notice your windows misting over).
- ✗ Don't leave your kettle boiling for longer than needed – especially if it doesn't switch off automatically.

Do:



Don't:



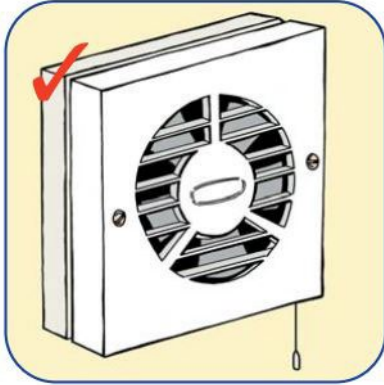
2. Ventilation of the home

Ventilation can help to reduce condensation by removing moist air from your home and replacing it with drier air from outside. However, don't leave windows wide open for more than a few minutes as this will chill the walls of your home and make condensation much more likely.

- ✓ Help to reduce condensation that has built up overnight by very slightly opening a small window downstairs and a small window upstairs. (They should be on opposite sides of the house, or diagonally opposite if you live in a flat).
- ✓ At the same time, open all the interior room doors in your home for a while – about 30 minutes every morning is ideal. This will allow drier air to circulate throughout your home.

Make sure that open windows don't cause a security problem – always remember to close windows when you go out.

- ✓ Ventilate your kitchen when cooking, washing up or washing by hand.
- ✓ Switch on your cooker extractor hood or extractor fan or open a window.
- ✓ Keep your kitchen and bathroom doors closed when in use to prevent warm moist air escaping into the rest of the house.
- ✓ Ventilate your kitchen and bathroom for about 20 minutes after use by opening a small window. Use an extractor fan if possible.
- ✓ Ventilate your bedroom by leaving a window very slightly open at night, or use trickle ventilators if fitted. (But again, remember your security).



Allow air to circulate around small spaces

- ✓ Reduce the risk of mildew on clothes and other stored items, by allowing air to circulate round them:
 - Drill breather holes in the back of furniture to allow air to circulate – or remove hardboard backs completely.
 - Place furniture on blocks to allow air to circulate underneath.
 - Keep a small gap between large pieces of furniture and the walls.
 - If possible, stand wardrobes and furniture against internal walls.
 - Pull shelves away from the backs of wardrobes and cupboards.
 - Never overfill your wardrobes and cupboards – this stops air moving and encourages mould growth.



3. Cold surfaces in your home

Condensation forms more easily on cold surfaces in the home, for example walls and ceilings. In many cases, those surfaces can be made warmer by improving the insulation and draught proofing.

The Council has replaced all wooden exterior doors with composite doors, which reduce heat loss and draughts. Some Council homes still have uPVC doors, which will be replaced according to a planned schedule.

Loft and wall insulation are the most effective forms of insulation. If you are a Council tenant, your home should be adequately insulated already.

If you do install any draught proofing, it's very important to follow our guidance:

- ✗ Never try to draught proof rooms with a condensation problem.
- ✗ Do not draught proof a room where there is a heater or cooker that burns gas or solid fuel. This will cause a risk of death or serious harm from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- ✗ Do not block permanent ventilators or airbricks installed for heating or heating appliances. You will increase condensation and may increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- ✗ Do not draught proof bathroom or kitchen windows as this will trap moist air inside your home and cause increased condensation.



4. The temperature of your home

Warm air holds more moisture than cooler air which is more likely to deposit droplets of condensation round your home. Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated rooms. It is better to have a medium-to-low level of heat throughout the house. Keeping the heating on at low all day in cold weather will help to control condensation.

- ✓ Never use portable bottled gas heaters in homes suffering with condensation as they give out a lot of moisture, are a fire hazard and are more expensive to run than electric heaters.
- ✓ If you have a freezer, it is a good idea to put it in a space suffering from condensation, as the heat from the motor may help to reduce condensation.
- ✓ Be careful not to 'over-ventilate' your home during cold weather. Leaving windows open causes the room temperature to drop, chilling the walls and making condensation more likely. This would also increase your heating costs.

To control condensation remember the key points

- ✓ Reduce the amount of moisture you produce
- ✓ Improve the ventilation – but don't 'over ventilate'
- ✓ Reduce the number of cold surfaces in your home
- ✓ Maintain an adequate temperature

I'm struggling with the cost of heating my home – can I get help?

Please speak to your income officer, or go to our website: www.dacorum.gov.uk/money-advice

I still have a problem - What next?

If you have followed all these steps, but you still have damp and mould, there may be a problem with the structure of your home. Please report this as a repair:

- The quickest and easiest way to report a repair is online at www.dacorum.gov.uk/repairs
- If you don't have internet access, or you are reporting an emergency out-of-hours repair, call our Freephone number **0800 018 6050 (option 2)**.