

Condensation and Mould

What is condensation?

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. When the air gets colder, it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear – this is called condensation.

You may notice it when you see your breath on a cold day or when the mirror mists over when you have a bath.

Condensation occurs mainly during cold weather, regardless of whether it is raining or dry. It tends to appear on cold surfaces and in places where there is little movement of air.

Look for black mould growth in corners of the room, on or near windows and cupboards. It also often forms on south facing walls.

How can I avoid condensation?

These two steps will help you reduce the condensation in your home:

1. Produce less moisture

Some ordinary daily activities produce a lot of moisture very quickly. We recommend you:

- cover saucepans and do not leave kettles boiling or hot water in sinks;
- dry washing outdoors on a line wherever possible, or put it in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open (or with an exhaust fan on);
- use exhaust fans wherever possible;

- vent any tumble dryer through to the outside, unless it is the self-condensing type (DIY kits are available for this); and
- fill baths with a small amount of cold water before turning on the hot tap.

2. Ventilate to remove moisture

You can ventilate your home without making draughts.

- Keep a small window ajar.
- Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms when in use by opening the windows wider. Better still, use the electric exhaust fan.
- Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use – even if the room has an exhaust fan. Closing the door will help prevent moisture reaching other rooms, especially bedrooms which are often colder and more likely to get condensation and mould growth.
- Ventilate cupboards and wardrobes. Avoid putting too many things in them as this stops the air circulating.
- Leave space between the back of a wardrobe and the wall to allow air circulation.
- Position wardrobes and furniture (where possible) against internal walls rather than external.

First steps against mould

First treat any mould you may already have in your home. You can do this by washing down the walls and window frames with a weak solution of bleach, but remember to wear rubber gloves and follow the manufacturer's guidelines.

If you then deal with the basic problem of condensation, mould should not re-appear.

To kill and remove mould, you can also wipe down walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash, which carries a Health and Safety 'approval number'. Remember to follow the manufacturer's instructions precisely.

Any clothes or fabric affected by mould should be dry cleaned. Disturbing mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning can increase the risk of respiratory problems.

The only lasting way to avoid severe mould is to eliminate dampness

Condensation is not the only cause of damp.

Damp can also come from:

- leaking pipes, wastes or overflows;
- rain seeping through the roof where a tile is missing or metal roof sheet has rusted; or
- back-flowing from a blocked gutter.

If your home is newly built, it may be damp because the water used during its construction (e.g. in the plaster flushing/painting) is still drying out.

If you do not think the damp comes from any of these causes, then it is probably condensation.

Some other tips:

- Do not use portable Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) heaters, which can be dangerous (monoxide poisoning) and can produce excessive amounts of condensation.
- Do not block any vents built into the walls of your home as these aid in ventilating your home, making it healthier.

