

Preventing condensation and mould

Higher heating bills?

Condensation, like all other forms of dampness, makes houses difficult to keep warm. The reason being wet building materials lose heat more quickly than dry ones and also some of the heat input is being used to dry out the house.

Condensation

Condensation is caused by:

- Too much moisture in the air
- Too little heat
- Too little ventilation

Too much condensation leads to mould.

Where are you most likely to find condensation?

Condensation often appears in the coldest part of the room or where there is little air movement, and therefore more moisture in the air, such as in corners, on or near windows, or around cupboards and wardrobes.

- Cold corners of rooms
- Wardrobes
- Cupboards, particularly built-in cupboards
- Behind furniture against an outside wall.
- Cold surfaces such as mirrors, single-glazed windows and metal-framed windows
- Kitchens and bathrooms (where moist air is produced through washing, cooking, etc).
- Walls of unheated rooms

Mould caused by condensation (different to other forms of damp)

Mould caused by condensation often appears as black spots.

Other causes of mould often leave a tide mark.

Reducing moisture

- When cooking, cover pans with lids and keep the kitchen door closed
- Make sure a window is open or the extractor fan is on
- Make sure your tumble dryer is vented to the outside
- If you have to dry clothes indoors, put them in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open or fan on. Or, put them on a clothes dryer in another room but make sure the door to the room is closed and the windows are open
- When bathing, run cold water into the bath first, then run the hot water. This will minimise steam production
- Don't put wet clothes on a radiator or in front of a fire

The average family can produce up to 20 litres of water per day, just by their normal day to day activities.

Where does this water come from?

We all produce water by drying clothes indoors, poor heating, the boiling of vegetables, showering and making cups of tea. It is just an on-going process that never stops.

Heating your home

It is best to tackle condensation first by reducing moisture in the air, and helping water in the air to escape from your home. However, you can also help prevent condensation by heating your home better.

- Heat all rooms even if they are not being used
- Do not place furniture or belongings in front of radiators as this will stop them heating the room efficiently
- Do not use the heating on a high setting for short periods of time.
- Heating your home for a longer time at a lower temperature will keep your home warmer and cost you less
- If you have central heating, use the thermostat to control the heating by setting the temperature to a comfortable level. The recommended temperature is 18 degrees C in your hall and 21oC in your living room (or up to 23oC if you have young children or are a pensioner)
- If your radiators have thermostatic radiator valves (TRVs), these will give you greater control over the heat from each individual radiator.

Ventilation

The most important thing to prevent condensation forming on walls and windows is to prevent water from getting into the air in the first place. After this, the next best thing is to make sure any water in the air can quickly escape from your home.

Too much ventilation (as draughts) can make condensation worse by making homes harder to heat (causing cold surfaces on which condensation forms). But if you seal off all the draughts, then the moist air cannot escape from your home.

It is important to allow plenty of fresh air into your home as otherwise the indoor air will become stale and humid, leading to unhealthy conditions

- Always keep a small window ajar or a vent open when someone is in the room. It is best to keep vents open all the time
- After you have had a bath or shower you need to open the bathroom window for a while until the steam has cleared, or alternatively use the extractor fan if you have one
- When cooking make sure that the kitchen door is closed and either the extractor fan is on (if you have one), or a window is open
- Do not switch off or tamper with any ventilation equipment provided in your home
- Extractor fans are used to quickly remove damp air from the kitchen and bathroom where the most moisture is produced
- Fans should be used whenever you are cooking or bathing
- After you have finished in the bathroom or the kitchen leave the fan on for about 20 minutes to ensure that all damp air is cleared
- An extractor fan will only work if the windows in the room are kept closed. If a window is open the fan will draw air in from outside, rather than drawing out the damp air from the room
- Some fans switch on and off automatically according to the amount of moisture in the air. Do not turn these off at the power switch as they are designed to work when they are needed. If you suspect that they are coming on more or less often than they should, then you need to report this to us.

Your windows may not be the coldest spot in the room (especially if they are double glazed). Condensation may therefore appear on walls, floors and ceilings, even if your windows are not steamed up.

Tackling mould once you have it

You may already have a small amount of mould in your home - if you do, there is often no need to call out one of our plumbers to fix the problem. It's often easy to remove with just a bucket of soapy water and a bit of scrubbing.

Other tips include:

- Removing small patches of mould that may appear on surfaces using one of the mould cleaning products suitable for that purpose. These are obtainable from supermarkets. Wipe down the inside of windows if they become wet with condensation
- Try not to place beds and wardrobes against outside walls as mould is more likely to grow behind furniture.
- Don't put too many things in wardrobes and cupboards as it stops the air circulating.
- When redecorating bathrooms and kitchens use a paint formulated for these areas.
- Do not decorate over walls or ceilings that have been decorated using fungicidal paint, with ordinary paints or wallpapers.

Removing mould as soon as it appears reduces spores in the air and can prevent further mould forming.