

Condensation and mould in the property are issues that you as the tenant need to manage and prevent. If during the tenancy there are issues with condensation, you will need to repair or pay for the repair of any damage caused. In the UK this is predominantly a problem in the winter months and below we set out some guidelines to assist you.

Firstly, for clarity - condensation is NOT damp. The causes of damp in a property can be numerous, they are generally structural, and are usually the responsibility of the landlord.

Condensation is a result of the way a property is ventilated. This is down to the behaviour of the tenant.

Condensation in itself isn't a problem, but the black mould (*Stachybotrys chartarum*) that can result from excessive condensation is.

In recent decades, rental properties, particularly older properties, have seen cases of black mould growth increase. Ironically, the cause of this rise, is often down to improvement and refurbishment of these older properties. Improved insulation, the installation of UPVC double glazed windows, better draught exclusion, and greater wall insulation has led to properties becoming increasingly air tight. It is the stopping of draughts that has meant insufficient airflow which has increased the prevalence of problem condensation.

When the moisture created within a rental property is not effectively ventilated, it will seek to condensate on the coldest available surface within the property, typically the interior surface of an outside wall.

Often tenants assume the grey stains that have appeared on a wall are caused by rising damp; sometimes it is, but most likely, these mould patches are a result of an issue with condensation.

For many tenants the primary concerns are to keep a place warm and to spend as little money as possible on their energy bills. As such, the thought of opening a window to let out the moisture from the clothes they're drying on radiators, or to leave an extractor fan running to de-mist the bathroom often sounds alien.

Condensation occurs when moist warm air comes into contact with colder dryer air, or when it hits upon a surface which is at a lower temperature. The moisture which is naturally contained in the air then turns from an invisible gas back into a liquid i.e. water.

Air contains water vapour in varying quantities; its capacity to do so is related to its temperature – warm air holds more moisture than cold air. When moist air comes into contact with either colder air or a colder surface, the air is unable to retain the same amount of moisture and the water is released to form condensation.



Moisture in the air comes from a number of sources. In a five person household there is about 10kg or 10 litres of water put into the air every day (without taking into account any heating) i.e.:

- Breathing (asleep) 0.3 kg
- Breathing (awake) 0.85 kg
- Cooking 3 kg
- Personal washing 1 kg
- Washing and drying clothes 5.5 kg

Showers are large emitters of water vapour; to reduce the amount of moisture in the air nothing beats opening the window. A task that many tenants, particularly in ground floor accommodation, are not always keen to do.

Below are some tips to help you manage this potential issue:

1. Pull wardrobes and furniture away from walls to allow maximum air circulation and prevent condensation and mould occurring in poorly ventilated areas of the interior
2. Closing doors in kitchens and opening windows will minimise the spread of moisture in the property
3. Keep lids on saucepans to reduce the amount of moisture released into the atmosphere
4. Tenants should keep the bathroom doors closed when bathing. Showers generally release more moisture into the air, so a mechanical extraction fan will help reduce this and it must be kept on and not switched off
5. Tenants should be aware that where they use the radiators to dry clothes they need to increase the ventilation by opening windows. Drying clothes outside is always preferable or using a spin dry which vents externally will all help reduce the moisture released into the building
6. Where the condensation problem is particularly persistent then a dehumidifier which extracts moisture from the air may help counter the problem
7. Mould inhibiting paints and sprays will help prevent the growth of unsightly black mould although they will not impact on the root cause of the problem
8. Where mould does appear, you should act quickly to remove it to prevent it spreading. This can be done by using a disinfectant or a fungicidal wash such as a diluted solution of Domestos
9. Dry all windows, windowsills, and any other surfaces that have become wet. Ensure you wring out the cloth thoroughly, do not dry on the radiator
10. Try to keep the interior temperature of the property at a reasonably constant level.
11. Ensure that all extractor fans are working efficiently. (If an extractor cannot hold a postcard to the vent when switched on it is not efficient enough)
12. If your property is prone to condensation, then daily use of a de-humidifier unit can be very beneficial. These come in all shapes and sizes, cost very little to run and draw out the excess moisture from the air helping to keep the condensation under control

