

CARE HOUSING ASSOCIATION INFORMATION SHEET - DAMP IN HOMES

We often find over the winter months, that there is a rise in people reporting problems with dampness in their homes.

Quite often it can be easily prevented. As winter approaches and the temperature drops, there tends to be much more condensation built up indoors because the cooler air cannot hold as much moisture, as it is colder and wetter people tend to keep windows closed, dry clothes indoors, and don't air out rooms as often as they might in summer.

We have put together some useful information about the main causes of damp and what you can do to prevent it.

Types of damp

There are four main causes of damp that can affect your home. Condensation is probably the biggest cause of damp in homes. This fact sheet will help you to identify the type of dampness.

- Condensation and black spot mould growth.
- Leaks from wastewater or service pipes.
- Rising damp.
- Penetrating damp.

Condensation and black spot mould growth

Condensation and black spot mould growth is caused when warm moist air condenses on cold surfaces, spots or areas and is the most common cause of damp or black spot mould growth in the home. In the UK climate, condensation in the home is very common.

The water vapour that causes the condensation is generated inside the property from day to day living activities such as washing, cooking and bathing. Even breathing and perspiration produces vapour and as we sleep, on average, an adult produces nearly half a pint of moisture through breathing and perspiration. That is why in the winter period when air temperatures drop the glazing in windows can become misted up with condensation.



The warm airborne moisture will also condense on cold surfaces which provide the environment that the black spot mould growth spores need to grow and flourish. In some severe cases the surface condensation can soak into absorbent surfaces, such as wallpaper, paintwork or plaster. The ridges in some anaglypta wallpapers or textured wall finish provide additional protection from any circulating air that could dislodge the black spot mould growth spores and so be more likely to support the establishment of black spot mould growth.



Unsurprisingly, black spot mould growth can usually be found around windows where the external skin of masonry is in touch with the internal skin of a cavity wall forming a cold bridge, in the corners of rooms, behind or even within cupboards and wardrobes where air doesn't circulate well.

Small amounts of condensation can be found in most homes, but if it is not dealt with, mould growth may occur and, in severe cases, this can make health conditions worse. It can also damage your furniture, clothes or decorations. How warm and well ventilated you keep your home can significantly contribute to the amount of condensation in your property.

Leaks from wastewater or service pipes

Leaks from water and waste pipes can affect your home both externally and internally. Affected areas look and feel damp to the touch whatever the weather conditions outside. The damp staining may lighten or darken on a regular basis for instance when a washing machine is used or during or after somebody has taken a shower or a bath.



Black mould can sometimes be seen on this type of damp but because the affected area is usually too wet and chlorinated to attract the growth of black mould it is less likely to occur. Although the black spot mould growth will not become apparent straight away a leak from a waste or service pipe will introduce additional moisture into the warm air in the property and so, with the movement of air, increase the amount of condensation that can be seen on window panes or surfaces and/or unseen on walls and ceilings. This may result in the establishment of black spot mould growth away from the source of leaking pipe.

Rising damp

Rising damp is caused by water rising from the ground. Most properties are protected from rising damp due to a horizontal layer of waterproof material (a damp-proof course) in the walls of a building just above ground level. A defective or absent damp-proof course allows water to pass through brick work and rise through the ground floor of a property.



Rising damp will commonly affect an external wall up to a maximum of 600mm (approx. 24 inches [2 feet]) above ground level and usually leaves a “tide mark” and white salts low down on the wall but there have been cases of it rising up to 900mm (approx. 36 inches [3 feet]) and also affecting internal walls but not quite as severely. If left untreated, it may cause wall plaster to disintegrate and wallpaper to lift and timber to rot in the affected area. In severe cases Black mould can sometimes be seen in areas of rising damp but not in every case as the ground salts in the water prevent its growth.

Rising damp will also introduce additional moisture into the warm air in the property and so as the moisture evaporates from the wall into the atmosphere, with the movement of air, increase the amount of condensation that can be seen on window panes or surfaces and/or unseen on walls and ceilings. This may result in the establishment of black spot mould growth away from the source of rising.

Penetrating Damp

Penetrating damp is usually only found on external walls or on ceilings. It is caused by a structural defect outside the home, such as cracked rendering, missing pointing to the brickwork, missing

roof tiles of broken or blocked gutters and/or rainwater pipes that allows water into the property. This kind of damp is particularly noticeable following rainfall and looks and feels damp to the touch.

Black spot mould growth is rarely seen on areas of severe penetrating damp as the cause of the ingress to affected area is usually remedied sooner than the time it takes the mould growth to become affected. Mould growth may appear as the wall or the ceiling begins to dry out if the dampness is allowed to dry out naturally and the room is unheated and unvented.



Any residual damp should be encouraged to dry out by maintaining an even warm temperature in the room, make sure that the room is ventilated and as a precaution apply an anti-fungicidal wash to the affected area prior to redecoration. In severe cases de-humidifiers and additional heating may be required to assist in the drying out process.

Like the other types of dampness, penetrating damp will also introduce additional moisture into the warm air in the property and so as the moisture evaporates from the structure into the atmosphere, with the movement of air, increase the amount of condensation that can be seen on window panes or surfaces and/or unseen on walls and ceilings. This may result in the establishment of black spot mould growth away from the source of rising.

Preventing black spot mould growth or moisture condensing on windows:

If you find you have a problem with black spot mould growth or moisture condensing on windows in your home, there are several things you can do to help this.

- It is a good idea to “air” bedrooms first thing in the morning for an hour to let moisture escape. Windows usually have air vents or a security setting that allows air to circulate. If condensation does form on the windows and surfaces, wipe it off.
- Keep the doors of moisture producing rooms – kitchen, bath/shower rooms, en-suites – closed when moisture is being produced and after for a minimum period of 20 mins. Ensure that the extractor fan is on and after 20 mins turn the extractor fan off and open the window slightly to provide ongoing ventilation.

- Use the extractor fans that are fitted in your kitchen and bath/shower rooms or en-suites. If you have an extractor fan fitted, make sure you use it when cooking or using the bathroom.
- Do not dry clothes indoors if possible, but if you do, dry them in the bathroom or kitchen, open the window, and allow air to circulate.
- Maintain ventilation - open windows, where possible, particularly when cooking, bathing, showering or drying clothes.
- Do not put clothes on radiators to dry, use a maiden and locate the maiden near a window which can be opened to vent the moist air outside.
- Maintain an even temperature in all the rooms in the property. Increasing the room temperature helps reduce condensation so provide background heating in rooms that are not used or only used infrequently and warmer temperatures in the rooms that are used more often and for longer periods. Try to keep your home as warm as you can afford to.
- It is best to have the heating on for longer periods of time at a lower temperature. Try adjusting the central heating thermostat and time clock if you have one.
- In areas of high moisture generation such as shower areas, baths black spot mould growth can be managed with a regular cleaning regime using a bleach solution or an anti-fungicidal wash.

Did You Know?

- On average every time you fill the sink to wash the dishes, an extra 2 pints is created in moisture.
- An average family bath or shower can produce 2 pints of water in moisture into the air.
- On average cooking produces over 5 pints of moisture a day.
- An average family produces about 20 pints of water a day in the form of condensation!

If you don't ventilate your home this moisture has nowhere to go and will build up on walls and ceilings and develop into mould.

If you spot signs of black mould in your home, the chances are it can be easily stopped with a few changes to your daily routines. If you have any concerns or would like further information, speak to your Housing Officer.