



Damp, condensation and mould

Information to help keep your home free from damp, condensation and mould

Here we give you some basic information about the different types of dampness that may affect your home.

Condensation is probably the biggest cause of dampness in homes, that's why we are providing you with information and advice to help you identify and reduce condensation as well as treating the mould growth often associated with it.

Types of dampness

There are four main types of dampness that could affect your home. It is important to understand the difference between them so that you know what to do about the problem.

1. Rising/Bridging damp

This is caused by water rising from the ground into the home. The water gets through or round a broken damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the natural brickwork if your home was built without a DPC. A DPC is a horizontal layer of waterproof material put in walls and concrete floors of a building just above ground level to stop water rising through the walls by capillary action.

Rising damp may be present all year round but is more noticeable in the winter as the water table below ground rises. If left untreated it may cause wall plaster to crumble and paper to lift in the affected area. Rising damp will only affect ground floor rooms. It will not normally rise any higher than 12 to 24 inches (300mm to 600mm) above ground level and usually leaves a 'tide mark' low down on the wall. You might also notice white salts on the affected areas.

Note: Black mould will rarely be seen where there is rising damp (and then only in the early stages). This is because dampness carries with it ground salts which can prevent the growth of black mould.

2. Penetrating dampness

This type of dampness will only be found on external walls or internal walls at the section where they are connected to the outside wall or in the case of roof leaks, on ceilings. It only appears because of a defect outside the home, such as missing pointing to the brickwork, cracked render or missing roof tiles. These faults then allow water to pass from outside to inner surfaces.

Penetrating dampness is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well-defined 'damp patch' that looks and feels damp to touch.

3. Defective plumbing

Leaks from water and waste pipes, especially in bathrooms and kitchens, are relatively common. They can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings.

The affected area looks and feels damp to touch and remains damp whatever the weather conditions are outside. A quick check of the water and waste pipes serving the kitchen and bathroom and the seals around the bath, shower and sinks, plus external pipework, such as guttering will usually identify the source of the problem.

Note: Black mould will rarely be seen on this type of dampness because the area is usually too wet and the chemicals in a waste water leak will prevent mould growth.



What to do if you think your home is suffering from any of these...

Symptoms	Probably	Next Step
Tide mark on walls approximately 12 to 24 inches above the ground, possibly showing white salts.	Rising damp	Report it to Bernicia
Damp patch on external wall or ceiling, worsening or reappearing during wet weather.	Penetrating damp	Report it to Bernicia
Damp patch on internal or external wall or ceiling, that remains damp whatever the weather conditions are.	Defective plumbing	Report it to Bernicia
Black mould appearing in corners of rooms, around windows or behind wardrobes or beds.	Condensation	Read on...

Condensation and mould growth

Most homes will be affected by condensation at some point.

However, certain activities can contribute to the production of condensation.

Cooking, washing, drying clothes indoors, even breathing – all produce water vapour that can only be seen when tiny drops of water (condensation) appear on colder surfaces such as walls, windows, and sometimes on bathroom and kitchen ceilings or mirrors.

The 'amount' of condensation in a home depends upon three main factors:

- How much water vapour is produced by normal day to day activities
- How cold or warm your home is
- How much air circulation (ventilation and extraction) there is in your home.

Simply turning up the heating will not sort out the problem, this may only temporarily reduce condensation.

All three factors may need to be looked at to reduce the problem.

The first sign of a problem is water vapour condensing on windows and other cold surfaces, and over a long period this allows surfaces to become damp creating the environment for black mould to grow. The second indication is black mould patches growing on these damp areas.

4. Condensation

This is by far the most common cause of dampness experienced by tenants, resulting in a large number of enquiries or reports to Bernicia.

Condensation is caused by water vapour or moisture from inside the home coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The water drops (condensation) which form, may then soak into wallpaper or paintwork or even plasterwork. In time, the affected damp areas then create the conditions for black mould spores to settle and develop into black mould that grows on the surface.

Condensation mainly occurs during colder months, whether it is rainy or dry outside. It is usually found in the corners of rooms, north facing walls and on or near windows. It is also found in areas of little air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially where they are pushed up against external walls.

Note: Black mould is frequently seen on this type of dampness.

Mildew, which is the common name for mould, is commonly identified as black mould because of its general colour. However, it can sometimes appear in different colours such as whitish grey, green or even orange/red depending on the background material it is growing on and the levels of humidity present in the environment.

Black mould (Mildew)

Mould spores are invisible to the human eye and are always present in the atmosphere both inside and outside dwellings.

They only become noticeable when they land on a surface upon which they can grow and then multiply. For mould to thrive and survive it requires four elements:



Moisture:

Obtained from condensation



Food:

Wallpaper, paint or plaster



Suitable temperature:

Provided by our heating systems or activities such as cooking and bathing



Oxygen:

Courtesy of mother nature

Five steps to reducing condensation and black mould growth

A five step plan can help to reduce the amount of condensation and thus black mould growth in your home.

1. Produce less moisture

Ordinarily daily activities produce a lot of moisture – see Common household moisture producing activities. There are ways to reduce the amount of moisture in your home and here are some handy tips:

- Dry clothes outdoors. Avoid drying clothes indoors or if you have to, dry them on a clothes airer in the bathroom with the door closed and either an extractor fan on or a window slightly open
- Vent tumble driers to the outside (never into the home), unless it is the self-condensing type
- Cover pans when cooking and do not leave kettles boiling and use the kitchen or cooker extractor
- Do not use paraffin or liquid petroleum (bottled) gas heaters. They produce large amounts of water vapour and can be expensive to run
- Always keep tropical fish tanks covered. Water evaporation from tanks can be severe
- Try not to let pets sleep in your bedroom
- If possible take a shower rather than a bath, this produces less moisture and saves money
- Don't leave the kitchen sink or bath full of water as this evaporates into the home atmosphere
- After a bath or shower use a squeegee to remove excess moisture from walls, tiles and shower screens. This will help cut down the amount of water by as much as three quarters.

2. Remove excess moisture

Always wipe the windows and window sills of your home every morning to remove condensation. This is especially important in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen – just opening the window is not enough. The water will simply evaporate back into the home and get added to by daily activities and will increase the production and effects of condensation.



3. Ventilate to remove moisture

It is important to remove condensation and excess moisture by ventilating rooms. You can ventilate a room without making draughts or causing it to become cold.

To do this, open windows at opposite ends to create cross ventilation and an air change or use the trickle vent which will often be found on UPVC windows. This allows warm (but moist) air to escape to the outside and let in cool (but dry) air.

- Always ventilate or open a window when using the kitchen or the bathroom and close the doors to prevent moisture in the air from spreading to other parts of your home. Continue to ventilate and use your extractor fans within these rooms for a short time after a shower, a bath or cooking and keep the door closed
- When you see condensation forming on your windows always wipe them down and dry them off or the moisture will simply evaporate back into the air and will add to new moisture created throughout the day.
- Clear window sills of clutter that will restrict opening the window
- If you have extractor fans fitted allow them to do their job by leaving them on at all times and using the boost control when you are cooking or bathing. The fans are extremely cheap to run and are really effective in extracting moisture, if they are not working please report this and we will repair or replace your fans
- Leave space between the back of furniture and cold walls
- Open bedroom windows for up to one hour as soon as you get up and throw back the sheets or duvets to air the bed and bedding
- Ventilate cupboards, wardrobes and avoid overfilling them as this prevents air circulating
- Do not block air vents and make sure you meet ventilation requirements for any heating appliances in a room.

4. Heat your home a little more

In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm and avoid condensation is to keep low background heat on all day rather than short bursts of high heat when you are in the house.

Heating controls on your radiators, room thermostats and the timer will help control the heating throughout your home and manage costs*.

*** Note: If you are experiencing financial difficulties talk to us so that we can help you get the right advice and support.**

5. Dealing with black mould (Mildew)

Black mould can grow on walls, ceilings, furnishings and even on clothes and toys, which can be expensive to replace.

To kill and remove the mould:

- Carefully remove mould with a damp cloth and throw away after. Do not brush mould or use a vacuum cleaner as this releases spores into the air, it is safe to wipe down and clean the area affected by mould.
- Wipe down affected areas using a fungicidal wash that carries a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) approval number or try an off the shelf damp and mould treatment spray, which can be bought at most supermarkets – remember always use rubber gloves and wear safety glasses or follow the manufacturers instructions. A simple saline solution, that can be made by pouring salt into boiling water until it no longer dissolves, also does the same job
- Tea Tree oil is a natural antiseptic and disinfectant but it's also great for cleaning, especially on mould or mildew. Try a dilute of three to four drops of Tea Tree oil in two litres of water (hot or cold). Soak mildewed items in the solution or spray onto trouble spots using a plant mister. Wipe, then rinse off. Always ensure you carry out a test on a small area of the fabric/ material/surface beforehand
- After treatment and the mould has been removed, redecorate using a fungicidal paint or wallpaper paste – do not paint over using an ordinary paint. Remove any affected wallpaper as this will hold onto spores.
- Dry clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets.

Remember...

Dealing with condensation is not easy. Only carrying out one or two of the above steps may not solve your problem. You need to do as many as possible every day, so that it becomes part of your daily routine. If after trying several treatments and you are following the steps in this leaflet and you are still experiencing severe mould growth then contact Bernicia and we will arrange a visit to assess the problem.

Common household moisture producing activities

Everyday activities add moisture to the air inside our homes.

Even breathing adds some moisture. One person asleep adds half a pint of water to the air overnight and an active person adds twice that rate during the day. The illustration below gives you some idea of how much extra water you could be adding to the air in your home in a day:

A bath or shower



Washing dishes



Two people at home for 16 hours



Bottled gas heater



Cooking and use of a kettle



Drying clothes indoors



Warmth versus ventilation

Striking the right balance between warmth and ventilation is important and can be very effective.

By opening windows or ventilating your home it may appear that you are losing some heat, but what you are actually doing is allowing warm moisture-laden air to escape and permitting cool dry air to enter your home. Dry cool air is actually cheaper to heat than warm moist air!

Many people who have double glazing installed experience problems with condensation and mould growth that they never had with their old draughty window frames. This is because all the natural draughts around the poorly fitted windows have been sealed. However, by using trickle vents, opening windows slightly or allowing your extractor fan to do its job then the necessary ventilation can be achieved.

Please note.

The advice is to ventilate for an appropriate period of time, not to leave windows open all day or night especially during cold weather.

Be careful not to 'over ventilate' your home when it is cold, as it will cause the temperature inside to drop and make condensation more likely. It will also increase heating costs.

Remember the five essential steps:



Produce less moisture



Heat your home a little bit more



Remove excess moisture

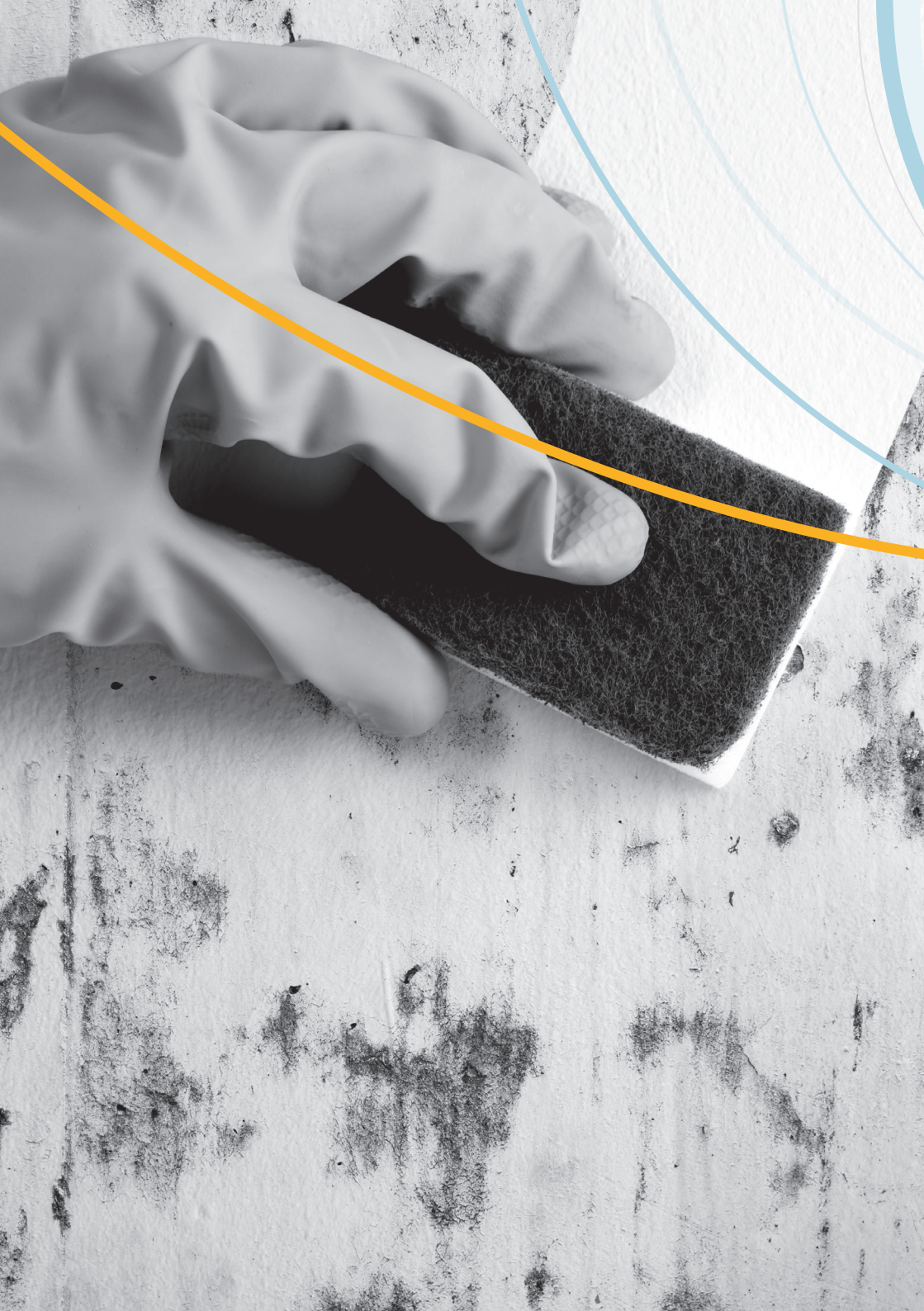


Ventilate to remove moisture

Deal with black mould growth

If you continue to experience damp and mould or it is getting worse please contact us to explore alternate options available.





Useful organisations

For advice on financial support and how to save energy visit:



www.gov.uk

Citizens Advice



www.citizensadvice.co.uk



0800 144 8848

The logo for Bernicia, featuring the word "BERN" in a white sans-serif font, followed by a stylized white "N" that incorporates a blue swoosh, and then "ICIA" in a white sans-serif font. The background is a light blue gradient with several large, overlapping, curved lines in white and orange.

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