Housing Services – Guidance for tackling condensation, damp and mould in your home
What is condensation?

The air around us contains water vapour produced by the environment and our daily activities, such as cooking and washing. Air that is warm can hold more water vapour than air that is cold. When warm air cools and/or comes into contact with a cold surface it deposits the excess water vapour that it can no longer hold on to the nearest cool surface. The water residue left on the cold surface is called condensation.

In Britain condensation usually happens during cold weather when warm, moist air is generated in one room and then spreads to cooler parts of the building. Condensation is most visible when it forms on non-absorbent surfaces like windows or tiles. However, it can form on any type of surface and may not be noticeable until it causes visible damage, for example black mould. Condensation can lead to misted or streaming windows and, in some circumstances, mould growth and walls that are wet to the touch. It is also one of the most common causes of damp in buildings. It is extremely important that measures are taken to prevent condensation happening and that any existing damage caused by condensation is treated before the problem worsens.
What are the causes of condensation and how do I prevent it?

Too much moisture being produced in your home
As condensation is caused by excess water vapour in the air, minimising activities that produce water vapour will help to reduce condensation.

- Cover saucepans when you are cooking and do not leave kettles boiling.
- Avoid using paraffin and portable bottled gas heaters as they produce excess moisture.
- Dry washing outdoors on a line or put it in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open or the extractor fan on.
- Avoid drying damp clothes on radiators as all the moisture they contain will go into the room.
- When filling the bath add the cold water first, then the hot water. This will reduce steam that leads to condensation by 90 per cent.
- Wipe over visible condensation on non-absorbent surfaces with a dry cloth to remove the excess moisture.

Not enough ventilation
Ventilating your accommodation will help to remove moist air that is being produced.

- Cross ventilate your home – cross ventilating your home daily will allow drier air from outside to circulate. To cross ventilate your home open the windows (they only have to be slightly ajar) at opposite sides of the house or diagonally opposite, if you live in a flat, and open the interior doors.
- Occupied rooms – rooms that are frequently occupied may need some form of ventilation all the time to allow the moisture produced by breath and water to escape. Keep a small window ajar or a trickle vent open to allow warm moist air to flow out.
- Kitchens and bathrooms – a lot of excess moisture tends to be generated in these rooms, which means that they will need more ventilation. When you cook, wash up, bathe or dry clothes, open the windows and use an extractor fan if one is fitted. Keep kitchen and bathroom doors shut when these rooms are in use to prevent moisture spreading throughout the building.
- Bedrooms – if wardrobes are not properly ventilated it can lead to mildew forming on clothes. Try not to overfill your wardrobes as this will reduce air circulation. Leave space between the back of large furniture and the walls to allow air to circulate and where possible do not put large furniture up against exterior walls.

For safety and security reasons please ensure that you only open your windows while you are in your property and remember to close them when you go out.
Cold surfaces
Condensation typically forms on cold surface. By reducing cold surfaces in your home you can reduce condensation. Loft and cavity wall insulation, alongside draught proofing windows and external doors, will help to reduce the cold surfaces within your home. If you rent your property from a private or social landlord please contact them before fitting any loft or cavity wall insulation.

Please note when fitting draught proofing:

- **Do not** block permanent ventilators.
- **Do not** draught proof any rooms that have existing condensation problems as these rooms will benefit from the ventilation.
- **Do not** draught proof rooms where there is a fuel-burning heater (gas fire) or cooker.
- **Do not** draft proof windows in the bathroom and kitchen as this will prevent the steam produced in these rooms from escaping.

If you are planning to carry out this work please contact the teams in council tax, housing benefit, private sector housing, income support or the family credit office, as you may be eligible for assistance to install insulation and draught proofing.

Temperature of your home
When heating your home try not to have one room at a high temperature while leaving the rest of the property cold. Air in a warmer room will always try to move to a cooler room and this will create condensation. Keeping your entire home at a constant warm temperature when there will help to reduce condensation. Ideally your home should be between 18°C and 24°C.

What do I do if I have an existing condensation and/or mould growth problem?

The only long-term prevention for mould growth is to eliminate condensation from your home. Following the advice in this leaflet will help reduce condensation and its effects in your home. If you already have mould growth in your home it will need to be treated. You should not disturb the mould growth by brushing or vacuum cleaning it as this will circulate the spores; increasing the risk of it causing respiratory problems. A Health and Safety Executive approved fungicidal wash should be used to treat the mould growth.

Medway Council tenants

If you are a Medway Council tenant and you have a problem with mould growth or severe condensation contact the Medway Council Housing Support Team, who will arrange for a surveyor to visit your home. Contact details are provided on the back of this leaflet.
Homeowners

Areas of mould growth will need to be treated with a Health and Safety Executive-approved fungicidal wash. If you are applying the treatment remember to wear rubber gloves and follow the manufacturer’s instructions carefully. After treatment re-decorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould. However, this paint is not effective if overlaid with ordinary paints or wallpaper. When putting up wallpaper use a paste that contains fungicide to prevent further mould growth. Alternatively, you may wish to contact a company that specialises in treating damp. Clothes affected by mildew should be dry cleaned and carpets shampooed.

What do I do if I have a problem with damp in my home that is not caused by condensation?

Rising damp
This is a result of moisture from the ground penetrating the lower levels of the building. This type of damp will normally leave a tidemark on the wall. If your property is older it may not have a damp proof course or a damp proof membrane on the solid floors to prevent water seeping through. If your property is damp proofed but you have rising damp, the waterproof layer may be broken.

Soil building up against the outside wall above the damp proof course may also cause rising damp. If the soil is less than six inches below the level of the damp proof course, it will need to be dug away to allow the wall to dry out. Damp internal plaster will need to be replaced, as it will remain damp despite the wall drying out.

Penetrating damp
This is a result of water from the outside of your home leaking into your building. This type of damp is usually a problem in older properties. Penetrating damp can be caused by blocked or faulty rainwater gutters, failed render or rain seeping through a roof where a tile or slate is missing. Repairing faulty rainwater pipes and gutters and replacing render may help to solve the problem.

Medway Council tenants

If you think that your property has either a rising or penetrating damp problem contact the Housing Support Team for help. Contact details are provided on the back of this leaflet.
Homeowners

If you suspect that your home is affected by rising damp, you should have the property surveyed by a contractor who is either registered with the Quality Mark scheme or a member of the British Timber Treatment and Damp Proofing Association, whose members are usually listed in the Yellow Pages. If you are on a low income, financial assistance may be available to pay for remedial work. Please contact the Private Sector Housing Team. Contact details are provided on the back of this leaflet.

What if I rent from a private landlord?

Your landlord should be able address some of the problems creating damp and mould growth. If you have poor insulation, windows or doors that do not fit, inadequate heating or ventilation or problems with rising or penetrating damp, contact your landlord and ask them to carry out remedial work. If your landlord refuses to do the work and the problem is severe, the Private Sector Housing Team at the council may be able to help.

Further information for homeowners and private sector tenants

If you own your home or rent from a private landlord and you are over 60, disabled, have a child under 16 and receive an eligible benefit, you might be entitled to a grant for loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and other energy saving measures under the Warm Front Scheme. Grants may be available for energy saving measures, including heating for low income households which do not qualify for warm front scheme.

For information contact Warm Front
  Phone: 0800 316 2805 (Monday-Friday 8am-6pm and Saturday 9am-5pm)
  Visit www.warmfront.co.uk

To contact your local Energy Advice Centre phone 01233 646 663 or visit www.cen.org.uk

You can also contact your gas and/or electricity supply company, Energy Watch and your local post office for advice on budget schemes, such as fuel saving stamps that can help to spread the cost of heating bills. Advice leaflets are also available at council contact points and libraries.

The Private Sector Housing Team can also provide further information and advice. Contact details are provided on the back of this leaflet.
Who to contact

Medway Council tenants

📞 The Housing Support Team: 01634 333601

✉️ Housing Services, Medway Council, Gun Wharf Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

✉️ Email: maintenancehousingsupport@medway.gov.uk

Private sector tenants

📞 Private Sector Housing Team: 01634 333066

✉️ Housing Services, Medway Council, Gun Wharf Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

✉️ Email: privatesectorhousing@medway.gov.uk

Website: www.medway.gov.uk/housing

☎ Minicom: 01634 333111

This information can be made available in other formats from 01634 333333

If you have any questions about this leaflet and you want to speak to someone in your own language please ring 01634 335577