



A Guide to Dampness

It is important to note that there are different types of dampness which each have different solutions.

Types of dampness that you might find in your home:



Condensation Dampness

Condensation is moisture held in the air, the problem occurs where lots of moisture is being produced, for example in the kitchen or bathroom, which then settles on cold surfaces and may result in black mould. This information leaflet gives advice on how to tackle this problem.



Rising Damp

This type of damp is caused by moisture rising up the wall from the ground below. This only occurs on ground floor walls and can usually be identified by a tide mark up to 1 metre above the ground. The usual remedy is to install or repair the damp proof course.



Rain Penetration

This can result from defects in the fabric of the building such as a property roof or stonework (outside wall) which allows moisture to come through. You will notice that this type of damp is worse in wet weather. The solution to this problem is to repair these defective areas and check that no guttering or drainpipes are leaking.



Plumbing Problems

A small leak over a period of time will lead to a patch of dampness close to the source of the leak. Fixing the leak should solve the problem.

If you think that the problem is condensation dampness the following advice should help you:

The Problem

Condensation is by far the most common cause of dampness in buildings and it affects both old and new properties. However, it is particularly common in houses which are poorly heated and insulated, i.e. have more cold surfaces and the problem usually gets worse in winter.

Condensation is directly associated with mould growth, which is usually found on decorative surfaces, especially wallpapers, where it can cause severe and permanent spoiling. The mould and its spores cause the 'musty' odour frequently associated with a damp house. The main places for condensation to occur are on cold walls, windows and floors, but sometimes it occurs in roof spaces and in sub floor areas where there is a suspended floor. Timbers in these areas may become damp and susceptible to damage by dry rot or wet rot.

The Cause

Warm air can hold more water vapour than cool air. Condensation is caused when moisture-laden air comes into contact with a cold surface. At this point, water begins to drop out of the air, and it is seen as condensation on surfaces. On surfaces such as glass and paint, beads or a film of water can collect.

On permeable surfaces such as wallpaper and porous plaster the condensing water is absorbed into the wall, and signs can begin to appear such as:

- **Slightly damp wallpaper (often not noticed)**
- **Development of moulds, usually black mould (*Aspergillus Niger*)**

This frequently forms in areas where there is little air movement such as window reveals, floor/wall and floor/ceiling junctions, behind furniture against colder walls and in a triangular pattern in corners. Note that Black Mould can only flourish on the pure water associated with condensation and is not generally an indicator of penetrating or rising damp.

Where the problem is very severe, water will even collect and remain on double glazing. In some cases, condensation may be long term but intermittent, forming only at certain times of the day or night. In these cases the only sign of condensation may be mould growth.

The problem can also occur well away from the site of most water vapour production. For example, water vapour produced in a kitchen may spread through the house into a cold bedroom where it will condense on cool walls and lead to mould growth.

The Solution

The following steps can be tried to control the amount of condensation within your property:

1) Improve ventilation

This will disperse the internal moisture laden air and replace it with drier air from outside (external air is drier than internal air most of the year). Ventilation is achieved by opening a few windows, installing air vents, and/or using extractor fans. However, it is most effective to remove the water vapour from where it is usually generated, e.g. kitchens and bathrooms. This can be achieved by the installation of a powered extractor fan. Better still, rather than making someone responsible for operating the fan, a humidistat-controlled unit could be used. These activate when moisture levels in the atmosphere reach a point at which they may begin to cause a problem.

It is also important to promote free airflow around furniture, especially where it is against cold walls. This will prevent a local buildup of condensation/mould behind furniture.

2) Heating

Coupled with ventilation, heating should be set or applied to give a constant low-level background heat. Try to keep temperatures in all rooms above **15 degrees centigrade** as this will reduce condensation forming on external walls.

Insulation: A lack of adequate insulation may hinder any attempts to use heating/ventilation measures to reduce condensation levels with a property. Insulating the property will have a threefold value in tackling the problem by warming the surface temperature of walls/ceilings/windows and will also help to reduce heating costs which will allow your home to be heated to a higher standard more affordably.

Glasgow Helps

If you are struggling with the cost of heating your property, and/or you are worried about fuel debt, support can be provided by calling **Glasgow Helps on 0141 276 1185**, or by completing their online referral form online at: www.glasgow.gov.uk/glasgowhelps

Additional Measures

In most cases, by implementing the measures described previously this should control a condensation problem. However, in more severe cases it may be necessary to use one or more of the following support measures in addition to the main heating/ventilation principles.

1. Remove excess water sources. This means removing systems within the house that generate excess water vapour. For example, bottled gas and paraffin heaters generate enormous amounts of water vapour. These alone may be responsible for the condensation. Further steps to eliminate water vapour include avoiding the drying of clothes on, or by radiators and never venting a hot air clothes drier (tumble drier) into the interior of the property.

2. Where solid walls are encountered, (or cold solid floors) these may be insulated by various dry lining techniques or, in the least expensive case, the use of thin polystyrene sheet applied directly to the wall. In all cases this will result in a warmer surface, thus lowering the risk of condensation.

3. Keep lids on saucepans while cooking.

4. When creating steam in kitchen/bathrooms - open windows and close doors to these rooms. This will let moisture escape and prevent it from spreading through the house.

5. Dehumidifiers - These remove water from the atmosphere; they lower the water content of air, and therefore lower the risk of condensation. One strategically placed dehumidifier can be very effective.

6. If there are black marks or mould growth, then wash down the surface with a mixture of 5 parts water to 1 part bleach and dry off with a cloth. This should be repeated as necessary. Anti-mould washes will kill and remove the growth, but usually their effectiveness is short lived, as the active ingredient tends to get washed out over a period of time. Anti-mould paint should remain effective for longer.

7. Anti Mould Paints - These are particularly useful where there is a high risk of mould growth, e.g. kitchens and bathrooms, and also where condensation is particularly difficult to control. They are applied like standard paints, and must not be decorated over once applied.

Who to contact for further advice

If the property you reside in is affected by dampness and you are unable to resolve the problem then please contact **Environmental Health's Public Health Team** for advice and assistance.

The team can be contacted by telephoning **0141 287 1059** or by completing the online request form which can be found at: [Report a Public Health Problem - Glasgow City Council](#) or by scanning the **QR code**:

