

KHG Housing Group main meeting Wednesday 29 November 2023

Damp and Mould

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Office for Health
Improvement
& Disparities



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities



UK Health
Security
Agency

The health risks of damp and mould in the home

Guidance developed for providers of rented accommodation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/damp-and-mould-understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-for-rented-housing-providers>

12th October 2023

National Context

A response to the Coroner's 'prevention of future deaths' report

- Following the tragic death of 2-year-old Awaab Ishak who died from a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home
- Response to the concern that there was no up-to-date information on the health risks of damp and mould that was accessible to the housing sector
- Primarily aimed at social and private rented housing providers who need to be clear on the health risks to tenants, their legal responsibilities and what they can do to address and reduce the risk of damp and mould
- Relevant to other professionals who have concerns for tenants' wellbeing or an interest in understanding the health risks of damp and mould and how to address them. Owner occupiers and tenants may also find this guidance helpful.
- A collaborative effort with UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
- Established an expert advisory group and engaged with over 200 people from organisations representing landlords, tenants, academics, experts on building design, environmental and public health professionals.

Introduction



Image by Freepic

- ▶ The size of the problem
 - An estimated 962,000 to 6.5 million (4% to 27%) households in England live with damp and mould.
 - People living in private or social rented housing are more likely to live in a home with damp and mould than owner occupiers.
 - Each year, the NHS spends an estimated £1.4 billion annually on treating illnesses associated with living in poor housing. [This](#) is reportedly an under-estimate of the true picture.
 - Poor housing will cost an estimated over [£135.5bn](#) over the next 30 years without urgent action

Key messages - overview of the guidance

Health risks



- Physical and mental health impacts
- Mainly respiratory, but also other health physical health impacts - *more detail following*
- Everyone is vulnerable to the effects of damp and mould, but some groups of people may be more at risk - *more detail following*

Regulation on damp and mould in social and private rented properties



- Housing Act 2004
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Decent Homes Standard
- Minimum Level of Energy Efficiency standard
- Building Regulations 2010

Responding to reports of damp and mould



- respond sensitively and assess the issue with urgency
- act promptly and with urgency on concerns about tenant health
- keep tenants informed
- prior to removal of the mould, photograph and document
- use a qualified professional where appropriate
- identify and tackle the underlying causes
- inspect at least 6 weeks after remedial work. If damp and mould reappear, investigate, possible intervention

Taking a proactive approach to reduce the risk of damp and mould



- clear processes in place to document, manage, act
- understand the condition of their homes to take a preventative approach
- understand some homes are more difficult to heat - consider support/signposting
- support tenants to understand what they can do to reduce damp and mould
- build relationships with health, social care and other frontline professionals
- ensure staff/contractors are aware of the health risks and the need to address underlying causes
- build relationships with tenants

Understanding damp and mould

Damp

- Damp is the build-up of moisture in a property and can occur in homes for a variety of reasons.
- It affects building materials, such as walls, floors, ceilings, foundations and/or home furnishings and belongings, such as carpets, curtains, wallpaper, furniture and clothing.
- In addition to causing damage, damp can also lead to the growth of mould and other microorganisms.
- Irrespective of the type of damp (condensation, penetrating, rising or traumatic), landlords are legally responsible

Mould

- Mould is a type of fungus that grows in moist environments. Mould can cause adverse health effects as well as damage to buildings

Housing conditions that increase tenants' risk of living in a home with damp and mould

- homes where residents feel unable to open windows due to concerns about security, noise, or high outdoor air pollution
- homes that are poorly or inadequately insulated
- homes with inefficient or ineffective and expensive to run heating systems
- homes that are poorly ventilated
- homes without adequate damp proof courses
- homes that are poorly maintained
- homes that are overcrowded

The health risks of damp and mould (1)



Image by Freepic

- Damp and mould in the home can produce allergens, irritants, mould spores and other toxins that are harmful to health.
- Damp and mould primarily affect the airways and lungs and can cause serious illness and, in the most severe cases, death.
- Respiratory effects include:
 - general symptoms such as cough, wheeze and shortness of breath
 - increased risk of airway infections, including aspergillosis (an infection of the airways with the fungus *Aspergillus*)
 - development or worsening of allergic airway diseases e.g. rhinitis, asthma and conditions that involve inflammation of the airways, eg bronchitis, COPD
- UKHSA paper found that in 2019, damp and mould estimated to be associated with
 - 5,000 cases of asthma
 - 8,500 cases of lower respiratory infections
- Contributed to 1 – 2% of allergic rhinitis

The health risks of damp and mould (2)



Image by Freepic

Other physical health effects

- Irritation of the eye potentially leading to allergic conjunctivitis
- Eczema, and other skin irritations or rashes
- Other fungal infections, especially in people with weakened immune systems

Mental health effects

- Living in a home with damp and mould can affect tenants' mental health due to:
 - ▶ Unpleasant living conditions
 - ▶ Destruction of property and belongings
 - ▶ Anxiety related to physical health impacts and/or looking after a relative suffering from damp and mould-related illnesses
 - ▶ Frustration with poor advice/being blamed for damp and mould
 - ▶ Social isolation from not wanting visitors in the home
 - ▶ Delays in response/repairs after reporting damp and mould/poor quality repairs

Vulnerable groups

People most at risk of health issues from damp and mould

- Certain pre-existing health condition, e.g. asthma, COPD, cystic fibrosis
- Those with a weakened immune system
- Those with disabilities, who are more likely to live in cold or damp homes
- People with poor mental health
- Pregnant women, their unborn babies and women in post-partum
- Children and young people
- Older people, especially those with a disability or poor access to healthcare services
- Those who are bedbound, housebound or have mobility problems, and difficulty getting out of a home with damp and mould, into fresh air

People who are most likely to live in homes with damp and mould

- People with a long-term health condition
- People who struggle to heat their homes and/or are experiencing fuel poverty
- People on low incomes
- People with disabilities
- People from ethnic minority backgrounds
- People living in temporary accommodation

People who may face barriers reporting damp and mould

- People from ethnic minority backgrounds
- Have moved to the UK in the last 10 years, including people seeking refuge and foreign students
- People in and out of homelessness and/or in insecure tenures
- People with a learning disability and/or neurodiverse condition e.g. autism
- People living with a mental health condition
- People who are dependent on alcohol and/or drugs
- People in receipt of welfare benefits
- People who live in houses of multiple occupation (HMO)
- People living in the private rented sector who have a fear of eviction
- People with either temporary or on-going support needs

Enforcement and compliance

| Legislation, with link | Housing Act 2004 | Environmental Protection Act 1990 | Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 1990 | Decent Homes Standard | Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| What's in the law? | Properties must be free from hazards at the most dangerous 'category 1' level, as assessed using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). | Statutory nuisances' that are prejudicial to health must be remedied. | Homes must be fit for human habitation. | Social housing must be decent. | Privately rented housing must meet a minimum energy efficiency standard of EPCE. |
| Who enforces it? | Local councils. | Local councils. | Tenants. | Regulator of Social Housing. | Local councils. |
| Who does it apply to? | Applies to private and social rented sectors. | Applies to private and social rented sectors. | Applies to private and social rented sectors. | (Currently) Only applies to social rented sector. | Applies to private rented sector only. |
| How is it enforced? Can be more than one enforcement route | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal improvement notices requires works in a certain time period. Legal orders prohibiting the use of part or all of a property. The council doing works themselves and charging the landlord. | A legal notice requiring the nuisance is abated. | Tenants take their landlords to court. | Regulator of Social Housing intervenes where failure to meet the DHS has caused, or could have caused, serious harm to tenants. | Local councils enforce. |
| What's the penalty? | Prosecution and potentially unlimited fine set by the Magistrates' Court. A financial penalty of up to £30,000 set by the local council. | Prosecution and potentially unlimited fine set by the Magistrates' Court. | The court can order that works are carried out and that redress is paid to tenants. | In extreme cases, social landlords may see funding suspended until they can prove to the RSH that they are fit for purpose and no longer present a risk to tenants. | A financial penalty of up to £5,000 set by the local council. |

Responding to damp and mould

When responding to reports of damp and mould landlords should:

- Respond sensitively and assess the issue with urgency to identify the severity of the damp and mould and potential risks to tenants
- Tackle the underlying issue promptly, and act with urgency when concerns have been raised about tenant health. Landlords should not delay action to await medical evidence or opinion - medical evidence is not a requirement for action
- Ensure tenants are informed about the steps that will be taken to remove mould and address any underlying issues and the timeframes for the work
- Prior to the removal of the mould, photograph and document the location of the mould, to help identify the source
- Remove the mould, to address the health risk to tenants, using a qualified professional when appropriate
- Identify and tackle the underlying causes of damp and mould, including building deficiencies, inadequate ventilation and condensation. Simply removing surface mould will not prevent the damp and mould from reappearing
- Inspect the home at least 6 weeks after remedial work has been carried out to ensure that the issue has been fixed and damp and mould have not reappeared. If damp and mould have reappeared, further investigation and intervention should be pursued

Taking a proactive approach to addressing damp and mould

Landlords - irrespective of whether they own one or multiple homes - should adopt a proactive approach to the identification and tackling of damp and mould by:

- Having clear processes in place to manage and act on reports of damp and mould and to identify common issues and trends in their housing stock
- Understanding the condition of their homes and using this to adopt a preventative approach to dealing with damp and mould, making the necessary interventions to ventilation, energy efficiency and building deficiencies before damp and mould occur
- Understanding that some homes are more difficult to heat, either due to their energy efficiency or cost of living pressures, and that this can make damp and mould more likely to occur. Landlords should consider what support they can provide or signpost tenants to
- Supporting tenants to understand what they can do to reduce damp and mould, where applicable and appropriate. This must never be a substitute for addressing the underlying causes of damp and mould
- Building relationships with health and social care and other frontline professionals supporting tenants to ensure that every opportunity to identify tenants living in homes with damp and mould is utilised, 'making every contact count'
- Ensuring staff and any external contractors are aware of the significant health risks associated with damp and mould, the need to address the underlying causes of the issue and not just remove visible mould, are aware of any processes associated with reporting and addressing damp and mould, and understand the importance of being sensitive to tenants' circumstances and vulnerabilities
- Building relationships with tenants, ensuring that tenants feel encouraged to report damp and mould

Resources

Please do read and share the guidance with your networks:

[Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-of-damp-and-mould-in-the-home)

Please also share our social media:

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1699801958746661077>



Contains

- Resources and training for landlords and housing professionals
- Energy support for households
- Energy efficiency schemes for landlords
- 13 • Tenants' guidance on damp and mould

More resources

- ▶ The doctor forcing landlords to act on mouldy homes – BMJ 2023
<https://www.bmj.com/content/380/bmj.p698>
- ▶ Damp mouldy housing and early childhood hospital admissions for acute respiratory infection: a case control study – Thorax 2019
<https://thorax.bmj.com/content/74/9/849>

Thank you!

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