



Damp and Mould Q&A

Draft

1) What is this guidance and why is it being published now?

This guidance sets out the health impacts of damp and mould in the home for landlords in the private and social rented sectors. It provides landlords with information that will enable them to have a thorough understanding of the serious health risks that damp and mould pose, their legal responsibilities, and the steps they can take to address and prevent damp and mould.

It was written in response to the Coroner's Prevention of Future Deaths report into the tragic death of toddler, Awaab Ishak, who died as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home.

We are publishing the guidance ahead of winter so that landlords are well prepared to understand the health risks of damp and mould and what preventative or remedial actions they can be put in place as a result.

2) Who led development of this guidance?

This guidance was developed by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) within the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in partnership with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

3) Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is primarily aimed at social and private rented housing providers in England and, where applicable, their workforce. This guidance applies to all types of accommodation providers, including social landlords registered with the Regulator of Social Housing; private landlords and managing agents; temporary accommodation providers; providers of asylum support accommodation; providers of accommodation for ex-offenders; and tied accommodation.

This guidance uses the term 'landlords' as a catch-all for all types of housing provider, irrespective of the number of properties for which they are responsible. The term encompasses housing providers and their wider workforce, where applicable.

The guidance includes information on working across organisational boundaries, so other professionals with an interest in understanding the health risks of damp and mould and how to address them may also find this guidance helpful. This includes for example primary and secondary care professionals, environmental health practitioners, social care and voluntary sector professionals supporting tenants, and contractors going into tenants' homes who may have concerns for their wellbeing.

Owner occupiers may also find this guidance helpful as it provides a summary of the signs and underlying causes of damp and mould and the types of professionals they may wish to involve in any remedial work.

4) How should landlords use the guidance?

This guidance highlights the serious risks that damp and mould can pose to tenants' health, the imperative to respond quickly, and the practical steps that should be taken both to address damp and mould and prevent it happening in the first place.

Landlords should use the guidance to help them to understand:

- the physical and mental health effects of living in a home with damp and mould;
- what might make a tenant more vulnerable to the health impacts of damp and mould;
- what regulations and legal responsibilities apply to them as landlords in relation to damp and mould in homes in England
- what to consider when responding to reports of damp and mould
- what can be done to reduce the likelihood of damp and mould developing in their housing stock

5) Why is it not targeted at tenants?

The use of this guidance will help to improve standards in rented homes and prevent harm to tenants. The primary audience for the guidance is landlords in the private and social rented sectors, in response to the Coroner's report into the death of Awaab Ishak, which concluded that:

“there was no evidence that up-to-date relevant health information pertaining to the risks of damp and mould was easily accessible to the housing sector”.

The guidance provides advice on how landlords can work with their tenants to address damp and mould in their properties.

There are a number of existing resources and independent advice tailored to tenants, the guidance provides links to some of these.

6) How has it been developed?

. This document consolidates the existing guidance in a form that is tailored to the housing sector, building on a rapid review undertaken by UKHSA.

The guidance was developed with an Advisory Group of experts in housing, health and damp and mould, and through engagement with a wider group of experts and representative organisations. This included academics, building engineers, environmental health professionals, public health professionals, respiratory consultants, and representatives of private and social housing providers and tenant representative groups, amongst others. A full list of Advisory Group members is included in the guidance.

Members of the Government's expert committee, the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP), were also consulted.

7) Will the guidance be refreshed at some point in the future?

This guidance is a part of a suite of work government is undertaking to secure better standards in rented accommodation. As forthcoming legislation and standards are introduced, we will consider the need to update the guidance.

8) What support is available for tenants who might struggle to take preventative action against damp and mould, e.g. those who might be struggling to heat their homes?

The guidance includes reference to resources which outline financial support for tenants, and support to improve the energy efficiency of tenant's homes, making them easier to heat. It encourages landlords to be compassionate to tenants' circumstances and to signpost tenants to these resources.

9) Who is most vulnerable from the health impacts of damp and mould?

Certain individuals may be at increased risk of the health impacts of damp and mould exposure. This could be due to health-related or age-related vulnerabilities, or because they are less able to report and act on guidance related to damp and mould, or simply because they are more likely to live in a home with damp and mould or face barriers to reporting it. Further evidence on vulnerable groups is summarised in the guidance itself.

10) How common is damp and mould in homes?

The 2021 English Housing Survey estimated that the number of homes in England with damp and mould range from 4% to 27% of homes, or 962,000 to 6.5 million households. This survey also estimated that people living in private or social rented housing are more likely to live in a home with damp and mould than are owner occupiers.

11) If the guidance doesn't contain any statutory obligations, what use is it to tenants?

The guidance makes it clear that tenants should not be blamed for damp and mould. Damp and mould in the home are not the result of 'lifestyle choices'.

The guidance can be a useful aid to tenants, allowing them to better understand damp and mould when they find it in their homes and also sets out their rights are in getting it dealt with by their landlord.

The guidance should also help them to better understand the health impacts of damp and mould in the home, in particular which groups in society are particularly at risk.
