



Office for Health
Improvement
& Disparities



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities



UK Health
Security
Agency

Guidance on understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home

Summary

Everyone has the right to a warm, safe and decent home and to be treated with dignity and fairness. Yet an estimated up to 6.5 million households in England are living in a home with damp and mould, which may put their health at risk. Damp and mould in the home are not the result of 'lifestyle choices' and it is the responsibility of landlords to identify and address the underlying causes.

The guidance has been developed in response to the Coroner's Prevention of Future Deaths report following the death of 2-year-old Awaab Ishak from a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home.

The Coroner's report included the concern that "There was no evidence that up-to-date relevant health information pertinent to the risk of damp and mould was easily accessible to the housing sector" (Matter of Concern 3).

The guidance is published jointly by OHID, DLUHC and UKHSA, following extensive engagement with the sector, including tenant representative groups and organisations.

The guidance is primarily aimed at all social and private rented housing landlords of all types of accommodation provision in England, and their workforce where applicable. Owner occupiers may also find this guidance helpful.

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 healthcare 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.

The guidance sets out the following:

Health Risks - Living in a home with damp and mould can significantly affect the physical health of tenants. The airways and lungs are primarily affected and can cause serious illness, including death. The eyes and skin can also be affected. Everyone is vulnerable, but people with certain health conditions, children and older adults are at greater risk of more severe health impacts.

Tenants' mental health can also be affected, for example from worrying about the health impacts of damp and mould, unpleasant living conditions, and destruction of property and belongings.

Regulation on damp and mould in social and private rented properties - Private and social landlords must adhere to regulations, underpinned by law, related to damp and mould. Lack of compliance can lead to prosecution or financial penalties. The guidance sets out the relevant legislation and standards.

Responding to reports of damp and mould – All landlords should:

- respond sensitively and urgently to identify the severity of any damp and mould and risks to tenants
- tackle the underlying issue promptly and act with urgency on concerns around tenant health
- ensure tenants are kept informed on steps to address damp and mould
- document and photograph the location of the mould
- remove mould using qualified professionals where appropriate
- identify and tackle the underlying cause(s) including building deficiencies, inadequate ventilation, and condensation - simply removing surface mould does not prevent reappearance
- undertake timely inspection following remedial work to ensure the underlying issue has been addressed, undertaking further investigation and intervention for any re-appearance

Taking a proactive approach to reduce the risk of damp and mould - All landlords should:

- have clear processes in place to document, manage and act on reports of damp and mould
 - understand the condition of their housing stock and proactively undertake the necessary interventions to ventilation, energy efficiency and building deficiencies before damp and mould occurs
 - understand that some tenants may struggle to heat their homes, making damp and mould more likely to occur, wherein they should consider what support they can provide or signpost tenants to
 - support tenants to understand what they can do, where appropriate, to reduce damp and mould, but never instead of addressing the underlying cause
 - build 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"
 - ensure staff and external contractors are aware of the health risks of damp and mould, the need to address the underlying cause(s) - not just remove visible mould, are aware of any processes for reporting and addressing damp and mould, and are sensitive to tenants' circumstances and vulnerabilities
 - build relationships with tenants, ensuring they feel encouraged to report damp and mould
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