

Keeping a Home Dry - *a damp home is a cold home.*

1. How common are damp and mould in the home?

Studies across the UK and Europe show between **30 and 50%** of homes and buildings have signs of damp or mould. Alton is likely to be worse because of '**wind-driven rain**'. It penetrates through into our homes.

2. What are the health risks of damp and mould?

- A **quarter** of all asthma cases are due to the toxins from mould.
- It also worsens the symptoms in **half** of those who already have asthma.
- This and other breathing problems can be particularly severe for **children** and the **elderly**. Plus those who are vulnerable, perhaps just out of hospital or on **chemotherapy**, are more prone to infections.
- Mould can also trigger **other problems**, like fungal infections.

The toxins mainly affect those who are 'allergic' to other things. They may have eczema or hay fever. The toxins circulate in the **air** and can also be transferred by **touch**.

3. What are the four causes for a house to get damp, condensation or mould?

- **Rain seeps** through roofs, walls and chimneys. Plus window and door frames, and any other openings for pipes, drains, letter-boxes, etc.
- **Rising damp**. It seeps up through a broken or non-existent damp proof course (dpc).
- **Water leaks** out of pipes or drains.

All the **activities of daily living** add moisture to the air, even breathing. An active adult in a warm room expires 800ml per day. Plus: washing clothes and dishes, drying clothes indoors, having baths, showers and cooking. The moisture hangs in the air and settles on cold surfaces as condensation. This can lead to mould forming.

4. How do I find out where the damp comes from?

Look and feel for signs of wet, damp or mould. Plaster cracking or blistering, old brown patches etc.

Start at the top of the home. First inspect the **attic**. Are there:

- Water droplets on the inside of roof tiles? This is a sign of condensation.
- Water running down the walls, perhaps near the chimney breasts? This indicates damaged flashing.
- Water sitting on the 'floor' of the attic, on insulation or wooden joists. Look up for holes in the roof.
- Water near any light fittings, or leaking from a water tank or pipes?

Inspect **each room**. **Pull out** all furniture, beds and appliances. Start at the bottom of the walls on the ground floor. That is where you will see rising damp. Move up higher, around any openings, on the floor, on the ceiling. Look for condensation on cold areas, especially windows and mirrors.

Remove everything from **cupboards and drawers**: clothes, kitchen goods, books, toys. Check bedding, pillows. Inspect the **outside** of the home. Check the **roof**: look for broken tiles, damaged chimney flashing, broken ridge tiles. Look at **each wall**: check for cracks, broken mortar, gaps around openings, windows, doors, pipes and drains. Check whether the soil comes **up close to** the damp proof course.

When it rains look outside for leaks from broken/ parted guttering or down pipes. Check drains for splash back.

5.How do I cure damp?

Old homes need regular maintenance and repair. **Repairs** will usually need professional help, such as roofers, plumbers, etc. Find recommended local traders and obtain 2-3 quotes. Note a brick wall takes 9 months to dry out.

<http://www.tradingstandards.uk/advice/approved-traders.cfm>

<http://www.checkatrade.com/>

Some jobs you can do yourself:

- Clear soil from close to the damp proof course (dpc), to at least 15cms below.
- If you have rising damp and live on a hill, install a drain. Dig it 60cms below the surface and run it across the back and down one side of the house.
- Use draught excluders on doors, windows and letter boxes to stop rain coming in.

6.How do I cure condensation?

Allow dry air to blow through the home regularly. This is easy to achieve by opening **all** windows and doors on a dry day for 5 minutes. Even in winter this is too short to cool the house down but long enough to ventilate all spaces. There is no need for dehumidifiers.

When using hot water for anything (showers, baths, cooking, washing clothes) and when drying clothes indoors, always shut the door of the 'wet' room and open windows in that room, or use an extractor fan. There should be a fan in each 'wet' room, eg bathrooms, showers, kitchens and utility rooms.

Ensure the attic is a cool dry space. Insulation must not overhang vents in the soffits. These are small ventilation holes just under the roof line. They are not always sufficient to cope with the moisture. You will probably need either roof vents (ask a roofer to fit at least two) or install ventilation bricks. These can replace two ordinary bricks at opposite gables ends - providing they are not exposed to driving rain.

7.How do I cure mould?

- Wash hard non-porous surfaces (e.g. tiles, plastics) with bleach. Dilute 1 cup of bleach in 1 litre of water.
- Wash clothes, bedding etc. in hot water; use borax or soda crystals if very bad. Dry on a sunny day outdoors. Soak in diluted bleach if safe for the material.
- Clean non-porous surfaces, eg walls, with white vinegar. Spray on neat and leave for one hour, then wipe clean. Or use grapefruit seed extract, 10 drops in a cup of water.

8.How do I prevent mould?

Keep a home dry. Keep pots and pans covered when cooking. Use a cooker hood extractor fan. Dry clothes outdoors, never on radiators. Use an indoor clothes drier when needed; place it in a separate room with the door shut and the window open, or on a trickle vent. Pull all furniture away from outside walls about 2cms to allow air to circulate. Keep wardrobes and cupboards only 90% full. Leave the doors open for some time. Allow space for air to circulate. Never leave wet or damp clothes sitting around. They add to moisture in the home, smell, become mouldy and even start to rot.

9.Troubleshooting

Even with all the best measures sometimes things seem impossible to cure. Ask us for further information or a free home visit. No pressure, just another view on the problem. We are not connected to any commercial interests.

Contact Energy Alton on 07811 462 659 or email energyalton@gmail.com.

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