

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

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SUMMARY

This keynote will present the new government guidance on the health risks of damp and mould for the housing sector in England. This guidance highlights the serious risks that damp and mould can pose to tenants' health, the legal responsibilities of social and private rented housing providers, the imperative to respond quickly, and the practical steps that should be taken both to address damp and mould and prevent them. Research led by UKHSA found that there was a considerable burden of respiratory illness in England from residential damp and mould. This work has fed into the new consolidated guidance.

KEYWORDS

Damp, mould, guidance, housing, burden of disease assessment

1 INTRODUCTION

In September 2023, the government in England issued new guidance on mould and damp in rented homes, following the Coroner's report into the death of two year-old boy, Awaab Ishak, who died from prolonged exposure to damp and mould in the home. The Coroner's 'prevention of future deaths' report included the concern (matter of concern 3) 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." The guidance is published jointly by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the UK Health Security Agency, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (DHSC/UKHSA/DLUHC, 2023), following extensive engagement with the housing and health sectors, including tenant representative groups.

2 BURDEN OF DISEASE ASSESSMENT

An estimated 962,000 to 6.5 million (4% to 27%) households in England live with damp and mould. While living in a damp and/or mouldy home is associated with the development or exacerbation of several respiratory diseases, conditions and symptoms, little is known about the burden of disease at a national scale in England. UKHSA research assessed the burden of asthma, lower respiratory infections, and allergic rhinitis from exposure to damp and/or mould in England in 2019 (Clark et al., 2023). For this purpose, epidemiological evidence was combined with health and exposure data from nation-wide annual surveys and modelled estimates.

In 2019, the presence of damp and/or mould in English residences (4% of homes) was estimated to be associated with approximately 5,000 cases of asthma; 8,500 cases of lower respiratory infections among children and adults and contributed to: 1 to 2% of new cases of allergic rhinitis in that year. Alternative data sources, primarily from self-reporting, suggest

that the percentage of dwellings affected by damp and/or mould may be even higher than the estimates used for this study, in which case the total number of cases could be 3 to 8 times greater. They also found that ethnic and minority and disadvantaged groups were disproportionately impacted by damp and mould, reflecting a persistent environmental health inequity. This research contributed to the development of the new consolidated guidance on damp and mould.

3 THE GUIDANCE

The consolidated guidance (DHSC/UKHSA/DLUHC, 2023) primarily aims at social and private rented housing providers and their workforce (managing agents, and temporary accommodation providers). It may also be of interest to health and social care professionals, owner-occupiers and tenants. The guidance highlights the health effects to damp and mould, the people who are at increased risk from exposure to damp and mould as well as the relevant regulation on damp and mould in social and private rented properties. It provides details to help landlords understand the overall process of how to deal with reports of damp and mould and highlights the need for expediency, particularly in severe cases or when involving vulnerable households. Finally, it provides advice how the landlords can take a proactive approach to addressing damp and mould.

4 REFERENCES

Clark, S.N.; Lam, H.C.Y.; Goode, E.-J.; Marczylo, E.L.; Exley, K.S.; Dimitroulopoulou, S (2023). The Burden of Respiratory Disease from Formaldehyde, Damp and Mould in English Housing. *Environments*, 10(8), 136.

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