

The effects of poor housing on health

A summary of the main health impacts of common housing faults, how to make improvements and who can help.

Produced by



DAMP, CONDENSATION AND MOULD GROWTH

Health Impact:

- **Asthma**
- **Bronchitis**
- **Range of other respiratory problems**
- **Arthritis and Rheumatism**
- **Mental health e.g. depression**

Main causes of damp

● Rising Damp

This results from a lack of an effective barrier (a 'damp proof course') between the water in the ground and the walls of the home. Water soaks upwards from the ground leaving a "tide mark" (not usually more than one metre high).

Action:

improve/repair damp proof course.

● Penetrating Damp

Rain water is getting into the fabric of the home through walls, render, unsealed joints, roof leaks, chimney stacks, flashings.

One common cause is blockage of gutters or down-pipes which results in rainwater running down the walls. If left untreated major damage can be caused to the building.

Action:

Repair cause of water penetration. May also have to remove and replace damaged internal plaster work and affected timbers.

● Plumbing Defects

Even a very minor leak in pipe-work can cause a significant damp patch.

Action:

Locate defect and repair as soon as possible.



Main causes of condensation

Condensation occurs when warm, moist air meets a cold surface. This may result in patches of black or green mould growth. Causes include:

- **An excess of water vapour in the air**
- **Cold surfaces eg. poorly insulated walls/metal window frames**
- **Inadequate heating resulting in the fabric of the building being cold**

Action:

- *Reduce level of moisture in home. Possible steps:*
 - *improve ventilation, especially in kitchen and bathroom*
 - *cover pans when cooking*
 - *reduce amount of wet washing drying in home*
 - *avoid use of calor gas or paraffin (both produce large amounts of water vapour)*
- *Improve insulation, particularly lofts & walls where cold spots cause problems*
- *Increase use of heating*
- *Install central heating which maintains a higher background temperature and avoids cooling down of the main fabric of the home*

Possible Financial Help

Warm Front grants. Loans or grants via some local authorities. Emergency help linked to welfare benefits or from charities. Check welfare benefits to increase income and/or claim lump sum heating allowance. Information from local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or AgeUK*.

NOTES BOX

COLD HOMES

Health Impact:

- *Respiratory illness*
- *Cardiovascular conditions*
- *Hypothermia*
- *Increased risk of accidents and falls*
- *Impaired mental function*
- *Mental health (depression/isolation)*
- *Rheumatism and arthritis*



Causes of cold homes

- **Inadequate or inefficient heating systems**
- **Poor insulation**
- **Under-use of available heating due to worry about cost.**

Action:

- *Improve or replace heating system*
- *Improve insulation*
- *The cost of energy is high and set to increase and being able to afford to keep warm is an increasing worry for many people. A combination of improving insulation to keeping heat in, making the most efficient use of the heating systems that are available, and claiming any financial help that you are entitled to eg. winter fuel payments, are all equally important.*

Possible Financial Help

Warm Front grants for central heating and insulation. Loans or grants via some local authorities. Emergency help linked to welfare benefits or from charities. Check welfare benefits to increase income and/or claim lump sum heating allowance. Information from local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or AgeUK.*

Did you know...

For every degree that the temperature falls below the winter average there are approx. 8,000 extra deaths

NOTES BOX

DEFECTIVE AND INADEQUATE ELECTRICAL WIRING

Health Impact:

- *Risk of injury caused by electric shocks or house fires*
- *Risk of accident or injury if circuits fuse/trip frequently and if sockets and switches are inadequate or poorly located*
- *Trip hazard caused by trailing wires and extension cables*
- *Mental health – worry about fire risk*

Indicators of problems with electrical wiring

- **Frequent fusing or tripping of circuits**
- **Extensive use of multiple adaptors/trailing cables may indicate lack of sockets and subsequent overloading**
- **Old switches and sockets may indicate that wiring is out of date**

Action:

- *Install a smoke alarm*
- *Instigate electricity company safety check, (but consider what action can be taken if system is condemned as unsafe eg. temporary emergency heating)*
- *A full rewire may be needed. If paying for this is a problem contact either your local home improvement agency or the local council to find out about grant or loan schemes. They may also have information about equity release. When rewiring consider improving location of sockets and switches to make them easier to reach, and increasing the number of sockets so that you don't need multiple adaptors or have trailing wires.*

Possible Financial Help

Local authority loans or grants in some areas – contact local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or AgeUK* for information.

NOTES BOX



DEFECTIVE GAS APPLIANCES OR COAL FIRE

Health Impact:

- *Carbon monoxide poisoning*
- *Risk of explosion in case of gas*
- *Fire hazard from blocked chimneys or flues*

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning

- *May be similar to viral infections, including*
 - *Drowsiness*
 - *Headaches*
 - *Nausea*
 - *Chest pains*

Exposure to relatively low levels can cause brain damage or death

Indicators of faulty appliances creating carbon monoxide build up

- *Soot or stain marks on appliance*
- *Yellow or orange 'lazy' flame - should be crisp and blue*
- *Condensation*

Action:

- *Install a carbon monoxide detector as well as a smoke alarm*
- *Ensure that boilers, fires and flues are checked, (consider what action can be taken if a heating system is condemned as unsafe and switched off) Checks and remedial action must be carried out by CORGI registered contractors*

Possible Financial Help

Local home safety initiatives. Local authority loans or grants in some areas – contact local *Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice or AgeUK* for information.

If you are wondering about how suitable your current home will be in the longer term, perhaps because of your health, and you are thinking about whether moving home might be a better option, you can get free, independent information and advice about your possible housing options from FirstStop. This is an independent, free advice and information service about care and housing options in later life.

Tel: 0800 377 7070 www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk

Did you know...

More people die from CO poisoning from coal fires than from gas appliances?

Regular chimney sweeping can prevent CO poisoning and reduce the dangers of inhaling coal tar fumes.

A-Z OF NATIONAL INFORMATION

AgeUK Information Line

This is a Freephone service offering information and fact sheets on issues affecting older people, including housing and finance. They can also refer you to local services.

Tel: 0800 169 6565 Information and fact sheets are also available on their website: www.ageuk.org.uk

Care & Repair England

Produce self help information for older people about organising home repairs and adaptations.

Tel: 0115 950 6500 www.careandrepair-england.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureaux

The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice, and by influencing policymakers. The national office can give details of local services.

Tel: 08444 111 444 www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Counsel and Care

Offers advice on a range of community care issues, including finding and paying for care, welfare benefits, and hospital discharge.

Tel: Advice Line: 0845 300 7585 www.counselandcare.org.uk

Disablement Information and Advice Lines and DIAL UK

DIAL information and advice services are based throughout the UK and provide information and advice to disabled people and others on all aspects of living with a disability.

DIAL UK (01302 310 123) can give details of local services. www.dialuk.info

Disabled Living Centres

At some Disabled Living Centres you can see and try out equipment that helps people to live independently and expert staff can give free information and advice. Info re; nearest centre from the Disabled Living Centres Council.

Tel: 0161 214 5959 www.disabledliving.co.uk

Disability Law Service

This is a free service for people with mental, physical or sensory disabilities, their families, carers or friends. It helps people to understand their legal rights, suggests what they might do to improve their situation and where appropriate may represent them. Tel: 020 7791 9800 www.dls.org.uk

FirstStop Housing Care Advice

A free, independent and impartial information and advice service (by phone, post and email) about housing and care options in later life, including retirement housing, other accommodation, care and support services for older people.

Tel: 0800 377 7070 www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk

Home Improvement Agencies

These local services help older and disabled people to carry out repairs and adaptations to their homes. To find out where your nearest agency is contact Foundations, the national co-ordinating body for HIAs.

Tel: 08458 645210 www-foundations.org.uk

Ricability

Ricability is an independent research charity that publishes impartial guides to a wide range of equipment and services which are of use to older and disabled people.

Tel: 020 7427 2460 Textphone: 020 7427 2469 www.ricability.org.uk

Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB)

Offers information, support and advice to anyone in the UK living with sight loss

Tel: 0303 123 9999 www.rnib.org.uk

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

Information and resources for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, their families, friends and employers, and professionals.

Freephone: 0808 808 0123 Textphone: 0808 808 9000 www.rnid.org.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Provide information and advice about all aspects of safety, including in the home.

Tel: 0121 248 2000 www.rospace.com

Trading Standards Departments and Consumer Advice Centres

TSI is not able to offer consumer advice. The government service Consumer Direct offers advice on 08454 04 05 06 or via www.consumerdirect.gov.uk. Trading Standards is a local authority service. Online help may be available through your local trading standards service website for both consumers and business. Use the post code search to find your local office. www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/advice/index.cfm

Energy Advice

Energy Saving Trust: To find grants and other information.

Tel: 0800 512 012 www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Warm Front: Government funded grant scheme. Advice, surveys and installation

Tel: 0800 316 2805

The Home Heat Helpline: A free, not for profit phone line set up to help British energy customers who are struggling to pay their fuel bill and keep warm.

Tel: 0800 33 66 99 www.homeheathelpline.org.uk

Carbon Monoxide – Gas Safety: Emergency Hotline: 0800 111 999
Gas Safety Advice Line: 0800 300 363

Information produced by Care & Repair England as part of its 'If only I had known..' project which is supported by the Department of Health.

Care & Repair England is a national charity established in 1986 to improve the housing and living conditions of older and disabled people. Its aim is to innovate, develop, promote and support housing initiatives and policies which enable older and disabled people to live independently in their homes for as long as they wish. Tel: 0115 950 6500 www.careandrepair-england.org.uk

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