

What is mould?

Mould is a type of fungi that typically grows in environments that are cold, dark, damp and have poor ventilation. It commonly occurs in bathrooms and kitchens where moisture is highest.

Condensation is the primary cause of mould. It occurs when the air contains a lot of water vapour, and this air comes into contact with a cold surface.

Mould can come in a variety of colours and often looks like staining or smudging accompanied by a musty smell. It spreads to new surfaces and can cause structural damage to the property.

Mould may release spores which can be harmful to your health, and it is important to take the right steps to prevent and treat it.

Preventing mould

There are many steps that renters can take to reduce condensation and combat the growth of mould.

- Ensure exhaust fans clean and working. Use them whenever showering, bathing, doing laundry and drying clothes.
- Open windows and doors so air can circulate properly, especially in the bathrooms and laundry areas
- Wipe away moisture from windows and walls in the bathrooms and any affected area
- Report any water leaks to WHL immediately
- Report if exhaust fans are no longer working
- Allow sunlight into the property wherever possible
- Clean up any food or drink spills immediately and clear fridges and pantries of expired food
- Hang out wet washing without leaving it in a pile. If using a drier, ensure there is adequate ventilation and use an exhaust fan if available

Treating mould

Prevention is always key, but there are many ways to remove mild levels of mould from surfaces. Ensure that you protect your health by obtaining a disposable respirator with a P1 or P2 filter. These can be purchased at hardware stores.

Some suitable mould removers include:

- Commercial products can be purchased from supermarkets such as Mould Off or Selleys Rapid Mould Killer (**always follow the safety instructions closely**)
- A solution of 3 parts cleaning vinegar and 2 parts water
- A solution of 70% methylated spirits and 30% water
- A quarter teaspoon of clove oil per litre of water in a spray bottle

After wiping clean the affected area, wipe the surfaces again with a clean, damp cloth followed by a clean, dry cloth. Ensure you are not cross-contaminating, as this will cause the mould spores to spread. It is not advised to dry brush mould, as this can cause it to spread.

Remember, if you do not take steps to **prevent** mould, it will continue to grow back

Renter rights and duties

The Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic) sets out the rights and obligations of renters and rental providers regarding maintenance issues like mould.

Renters must:

- Follow the above steps to prevent mould wherever possible
- Keep the premises reasonably clean, including using adequate ventilation and removing food spills or rubbish
- Advise WHL immediately of any damage to the premises
- Advise WHL immediately of any maintenance issues, such as water leaks
- Take reasonable steps to limit their loss (e.g., don't leave your clothes hanging in a damp room)

WHL must:

- Ensure the premises is reasonably clean and fit for habitation when the renter moves in. This includes ensuring there is adequate ventilation, plumbing and drainage
- Keep the premises in reasonable repair (unless the renter is causing the disrepair)
- Remedy any mould issues urgently if it is being caused by the building structure and not the renter's acts or omissions

If a mould issue caused by a renter's act or omission is serious and the renter cannot rectify it, WHL will take VCAT action to seek compensation for any repairs.

The most important thing to do to reduce the risk of mould getting out of hand is to follow the above advice and **notify WHL as soon as you are aware of mould in the property**. Your Tenancy and Asset Officers can provide advice to you about fixing the issue and preventing it in the future.

For more information about your rights and duties, contact Consumer Affairs on 1300 558 181