Mould Cleaning, Redecoration & Ventilation — What Helps (And What Doesn't)

An evidence-led guide to managing mould and avoiding short-term or ineffective fixes.

Evidence-led damp & mould assessment aligned with BS 5250

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Mould Is a Symptom, Not the Problem

Mould growth in buildings is fundamentally a moisture imbalance issue, not simply a surface contamination problem. Understanding this distinction is essential for effective long-term management.

Whilst cleaning removes the visible signs of mould, it does not address the underlying environmental conditions that allowed it to develop in the first place.

Long-term mould control requires addressing the moisture conditions that allow it to form — including humidity, surface temperature, airflow, and building fabric — not just treating visible growth.

Cold Surfaces

Thermal bridges and inadequate insulation create surfaces below dewpoint temperature

High Relative Humidity

Excess moisture in the air increases condensation risk on cooler surfaces

Limited Airflow

Stagnant air allows localised humidity to build, particularly in corners and behind furniture

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When Cleaning & Redecoration Can Help

These measures are suitable only where condensation is the confirmed moisture mechanism and structural damp has been excluded.

There are specific scenarios where mould washing and redecoration may form part of an appropriate response. These typically involve light, surface-level mould growth associated with condensation, where there is no evidence of ongoing structural moisture ingress.

Surface-Level Growth Only

Mould confined to painted or tiled surfaces, with no penetration into substrate materials or evidence of sustained dampness within the construction.

Condensation-Related Issues

Growth patterns consistent with water vapour condensing on cold surfaces, typically in bathrooms, kitchens, or poorly ventilated bedrooms during winter months.

No Structural Moisture Present

Absence of rising damp, penetrating damp, or leaks. Building fabric is fundamentally sound, with moisture issues limited to surface condensation.

Important: Cleaning and redecoration are supporting measures that improve aesthetics and hygiene. They do not, on their own, correct the environmental conditions that permit mould growth.

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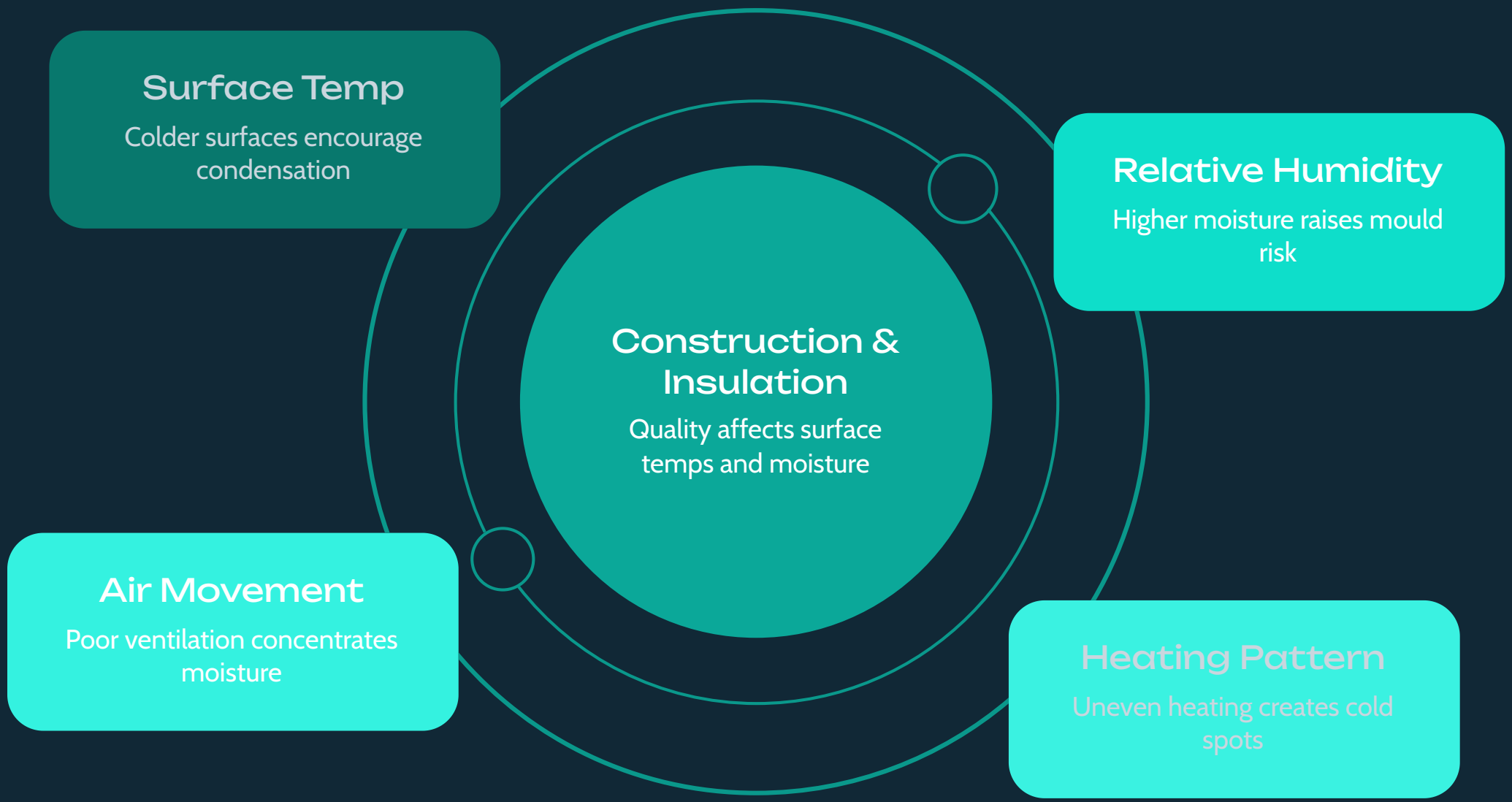
Why Mould Often Returns

Mould commonly returns after cleaning because the environmental conditions that caused it have not changed. British Standard BS 5250 identifies the key factors that govern condensation risk and mould growth potential.



Critical Environmental Factors

- **Surface temperature:** Determined by insulation, thermal bridging, and heating provision
- **Relative humidity:** Influenced by moisture generation, ventilation rates, and air temperature
- **Air movement:** Affects moisture distribution and surface drying
- **Heating patterns:** Intermittent heating can worsen condensation during warm-up cycles
- **Construction quality:** Insulation levels, airtightness, and thermal performance

> If these interrelated conditions remain unaddressed, mould is likely to return within weeks or months of cleaning, regardless of the cleaning method or products used.

Lasting control requires changing the internal conditions so the environment no longer supports condensation or mould growth.

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Paints & Finishes: Important Clarification

The choice of decorative finish can influence surface moisture behaviour, but it is essential to understand both the potential benefits and the significant limitations of paint selection in mould control.

Vapour Permeability Matters

Overly impermeable finishes (such as vinyl wallpapers or some gloss paints) can trap moisture behind the surface layer, potentially increasing localised condensation risk and mould growth at the substrate interface.

Paint Cannot Warm Surfaces

No decorative coating can compensate for cold surfaces caused by inadequate insulation or thermal bridging. Surface temperature is determined by the building fabric, not the finish applied to it.

Ventilation Remains Essential

Breathable paints or specialised finishes do not eliminate the need for adequate ventilation. Moisture must be removed from the air; paint selection alone cannot achieve this.

Evidence-led position: Whilst paint chemistry can influence surface moisture dynamics to a limited degree, paints alone do not prevent mould where moisture conditions remain unchanged. Specialised coatings may delay reappearance but do not address the underlying temperature, humidity, and ventilation factors that permit growth.

The Role of Ventilation

Ventilation is often presented as the primary solution to condensation and mould. Whilst it is indeed a critical component of moisture management, its effectiveness depends entirely on correct specification, installation, and operation.

When Ventilation Helps

- **Correct sizing:** Extract rates must match moisture generation and room volume
- **Strategic location:** Fans placed near moisture sources (showers, hobs) are most effective
- **Consistent operation:** Intermittent use is far less effective than continuous low-level extraction
- **Alignment with building use:** Ventilation strategy must reflect actual occupancy and moisture production patterns

Installing an extract fan without considering these factors rarely delivers meaningful improvement.

Common Limitation

Ventilation reduces airborne moisture but does not raise surface temperatures. Where walls or corners remain cold, ventilation alone may reduce — but not eliminate — mould risk.

A Proportionate, Evidence-Led Approach

Effective mould management typically requires a combination of measures, tailored to the specific building and use pattern. A balanced response might include:

Mould Cleaning

Remove existing growth safely and thoroughly

Appropriate Finishes

Select breathable, vapour-permeable coatings

Ventilation Improvements

Ensure adequate, well-positioned extract capacity

Heating Adjustments

Maintain consistent background temperatures

Address Cold Surfaces

Improve insulation where thermal bridging is identified

> Not every mould issue requires major building works. However, cleaning alone is rarely sufficient for long-term resolution. The most effective approach is one that addresses the specific combination of factors contributing to moisture imbalance in each individual case.
