

Keeping Germs at Bay in Shared Accommodation

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Shared accommodation and events such as Freshers Week with lots of people together indoors can provide the perfect conditions for viruses to spread from one person to another. So how can you enjoy the fun of such events and also hopefully avoid getting sick?

Jamie Woodhall, UK Technical & Innovations Manager, [Initial Washroom Hygiene](#) shares his advice which may be useful for FMs to share with tenants.

- Make handwashing a priority: with approximately 80% of diseases transmitted through poor hand hygiene and contact with contaminated surfaces, the first step in preventing the spread of illnesses is washing your hands thoroughly and often. Remember to use soap, wash for a duration of 20-25 seconds, thoroughly rinse and dry your hands, and consider using hand sanitiser as an additional precaution.
- Sanitise shared surfaces: clean and disinfect surfaces that are regularly touched by multiple hands or objects to reduce cross contamination risks.
- Avoid sharing items such as: towels, cutlery, cups, plates, and kitchen utensils with others.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth: if you do, then wash your hands.
- If you become ill: stay away from other people as much as possible for the duration of your symptoms and for another 24 hours after any fever (should you experience one) has gone.
- Pack the essentials: a small bottle of hand sanitiser to carry in your bag or jacket pocket on a night out, and antibacterial wipes or a spray for a quick wipe of shared surfaces like door handles and kitchen counters is advisable.

Many illnesses that spread in halls, like norovirus (which causes sickness and diarrhoea), are often passed on through poor hand hygiene, and prevention starts with good habits – a handwashing video can be found [here](#).

Smart Habits to Help Prevent Mould in Your Accommodation

Nicholas Donnithorne, UK Technical Manager, [Peter Cox](#), adds: “Mould thrives in humid, poorly ventilated environments, exactly the kind you might find in busy student kitchens and bathrooms. Often, the root cause of mould growth indoors is condensation, which occurs when warm, moist air comes into contact with cold surfaces like a wall, window or mirror and condenses into a liquid state. Everyday activities such as bathing and showering, cooking and drying clothes inside, can all increase humidity levels. With poor ventilation, condensation can lead to black mould.”

Here are Nicholas’ practical tips to help keep mould away in your university accommodation:

- Ventilate regularly: open windows for at least 10 minutes a day, especially after cooking or showering. Even better, keep a quarterlight ajar or use the trickle vents on windows for background ventilation. You should also use an extractor fan in the kitchen and bathroom (if fitted) whenever cooking, showering, or bathing.
- Close doors: keep bathroom and kitchen doors shut during use to prevent moisture from escaping to other areas of the building.
- Use lids when cooking: as this reduces the amount of steam being released into the air.
- Avoid drying laundry on radiators: as this blocks the heat and prevents the air from circulating. It also releases large amounts of water vapour as the clothes dry, which can lead to condensation. If you must dry clothes indoors, use a drying rack or airer in a well-ventilated room.
- Wipe away condensation: clean windows and mirrors daily if they fog up to avoid letting moisture sit and wring the damp cloth out in a sink, so the water does not evaporate off into the room.

“Dehumidifiers can help in very damp spaces, but they require regular emptying and aren’t a substitute for proper ventilation. If you notice black spots forming on walls or ceilings, or a musty smell that won’t go away, it might be time to let your accommodation office, landlord or student housing provider know. While a little mould might not seem like a big deal, it can pose a risk, particularly if you suffer from asthma or allergies.”

If you do encounter mould, cleaning it properly is key, but you need to address the underlying cause of the dampness first.

- Biocidal cleaners are most effective: look for those with a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) registration number to ensure they’re proven to work.
- Bleach-based products: can be used to remove mould stains, but a separate biocide will provide longer-term protection.