



Is your home making you sick?
The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act
— what you need to know...

Almost half of UK renters say they've been injured or suffered illness due to the condition of their home, according to a nationally-representative study* of 1,000 UK renters conducted on behalf of Aspect.

44% of people who are currently renting, or have rented a home in the UK in the past, say the condition of their home has caused them illness or injury, with respiratory problems arising from mould and damp, allergies linked to environmental irritants and illness related to poor heating among the most common complaints. One-in-five (19.4%) renters said the condition of their home had caused them stress or anxiety.

As well as making their inhabitants ill, badly maintained rental properties have the potential to cause injuries too. 8% say they've sustained cuts and scrapes from sharp edges and poorly-fitted fixtures, the same proportion said they've experienced an injury from a trip or fall caused by the condition of their home, such as from a loose-fitting carpet or a loose step. 6% have had an electric shock from a landlord-supplied appliance, 4% have experienced puncture wounds and 3% have sustained burns. 4% of UK renters say they've experienced a carbon monoxide related illness that they directly attribute to the condition of their home. Even though some of these figures appear to be relatively low percentage wise, any party involved should certainly not underestimate them as ultimately they can all have a huge affect on a person's wellbeing and health. According to the Department of Health and Social Care, there are approximately 50 carbon monoxide related deaths per year in the UK.



Most commonly reported health and injury issues in UK rental property

Health problem	Experience rate
Stress/anxiety due to general condition of home	19.4%
Illness related to cold environment/poor heating	14.3%
Allergies/reactions related to environmental irritants (fleas, dust mites, bedbugs)	10.7%
Lung/respiratory problem from mould/damp	10.1%
Stress/anxiety due to vermin/pests	7.9%
Cuts and scrapes from jagged edges/poorly fitted fixtures	7.8%
Injury from property related trip hazard (loose steps, carpet)	7.6%
Interrupted sleep due to vermin/pests	7.4%
Electric shocks from faulty appliances/electrics	6.0%
Bacterial infection (e.g. legionnaires disease)	4.5%
Puncture wounds from jagged edges/poorly fitted fixtures	4.1%
Carbon monoxide related illness	3.8%
Burns from faulty appliances	3.3%

Base: 1,000 respondents

Renting-related health problems disproportionately affect the young. The youngest renters are 24% more likely to experience illness and injury related to a rental property compared to the national average.

58% of 18-24 year-olds, 56% of 25-34 year-olds and 54% of 35-44 year-olds have experienced an illness or injury due to the condition of their rented home. That's significantly higher than the 39% of 45-54 year-old renters and 27% of over-55s who reported the same.



Says Nick Bizley, commercial director at Aspect:

“From first-hand experience, this imbalance can be directly related to the younger age group not being confident enough to bring maintenance issues up with their landlord. They are more likely to not mention small issues to them and over time, these issues can escalate and before they know it the problem is much bigger, potentially more harmful to themselves and other housemates and tenants and also far more costly to the landlord to correct. Whenever renting a property, no matter what age group you’re in or type of property you live in, it is always advisable to feed any maintenance issues back to the managing agent or landlord so they can be addressed as soon as possible and ultimately all parties concerned will benefit in the long run.”

Rental health around the UK

London had the most property-related injuries and health problems, but as a proportion of residents, Birmingham came out as the UK’s capital of poor rental health.

Cities with most property-related illness and injury

City	Residents experiencing illness or injury
Birmingham	57.6%
Swansea	57.1%
Plymouth	56.5%
Leeds	55.0%
London	52.9%
Edinburgh	52.0%

Cities with fewest property-related illness and injury

City	Residents experiencing illness or injury
Chelmsford	14.3%
Oxford	30.4%
Liverpool	31.4%
Manchester	31.5%
Aberdeen	33.3%
Glasgow	37.9%

Nick adds:

"It's alarming but not surprising that so many UK tenants are reporting health problems directly related to the condition of their home. Our tradespeople regularly see and report examples of corner-cutting on maintenance, especially where properties have been converted into homes of multiple occupancy, such as a large houses converted into flats, but also at the higher end of the property market too.

"One of our tradespeople recently discovered a homeowner's drinking water was being fed from a water storage tank rather than being connected directly to a mains supply. This had been done during extensive refurbishment work at the property. You should never drink water from a storage tank as tanks provide the right conditions for bacteria, such as legionella, to exist. Our tradespeople warned the customer they should change their plumbing as soon as possible and to not drink water from their taps on the meantime.

"Our people also regularly see poorly ventilated homes as a direct result of landlords converting large properties into flats without allowing for sufficient ventilation in each subsequent property. This leads to warm, moist air within a property. When condensation forms it becomes a perfect breeding ground for many types of mould, which is proven to have a detrimental impact on health. In all bathrooms, shower rooms and utility rooms it is always advisable to install the correct extractor fans and also have trickle vents installed into window frames where required."

"Other causes of water ingress and damp we see a lot are due to poorly maintained timber windows. As soon as you see the window paint cracking or flaking off, the bare timber is exposed to the elements and the window starts drawing water into the frame and subsequently inside the property, culminating in a damp patch around or below the window."

"A common cause of damp and mould we find within rental properties is not always linked to the property's condition though but rather the living habits of the tenants. Tenants drying clothes directly over radiators with no windows open, rather than in a utility room or outside on the washing line can result in mould growth. Water from the wet clothes evaporates into the air due to the heat from the radiator and remains within the room due to a lack of ventilation. This will then quickly turn into condensation on walls or skirting board or window frames where black mould will grow if not addressed".

"Another cause of damage to rental properties we witness on a day to day basis is from leaking taps or pipework that are just ignored. We often come across kitchen worktops and base units that have been severely damaged and require replacement as a result of drips from a tap handle which damages laminate worktops and causes them to swell or rot. Sometimes the leak is from the underside of the tap (tap connector) where it constantly drips into a base unit and destroys it over time. The damp, organic and stagnant air conditions provide the perfect environment for mould to grow. If addressed at first instance these situations could be fixed quickly, efficiently and with minimal disruption to all parties involved."

"This time of year especially, we receive a high volume of calls regarding overflowing and leaking rainwater guttering and downpipes, which allows large amounts of water to cascade down a building's brickwork and over time, saturate it and cause a damp or wet patch to appear on the inside of a property."

"We also experience a lot of callouts relating to water leaks underneath floors. We then find out from the tenant that the central heating system has been losing pressure over a period of time, sometimes weeks or months, but nothing has been done to rectify it until the visible damage gets too bad to live with."

"Aspect tradespeople have also reported non-isolated gas lines where the entire gas supply was located in the ground floor flat in a block of four. Another shortcut we regularly see is landlord-supplied appliances that haven't been PAT tested. I think some landlords try to avoid their obligations so we hope this new legislation will clarify their obligation to ensure homes are fit for habitation and lead to a general improvement for living conditions across the rental sector."

The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act - what you need to know

The Act redefines the obligations of landlords as they relate to the condition of a rented home. Before the new legislation, a landlord would likely be considered in breach of contract if their property were not considered to be in a good state of repair. This typically refers to specific measurable failures, such as broken windows and faulty appliances. The new Act demands that landlords also ensure properties are 'fit for habitation', which includes matters such as good ventilation and access to natural light.

At a glance:

- Takes effect March 20th 2019
- It upgrades a landlord's obligation from keeping a property 'in repair' to 'fit for habitation' – a key distinction
- It applies to:
 - All tenancies of up to seven years that started on or after the date on which the Act comes into force
 - All fixed-term tenancies that become periodical tenancies (rolling contract) after March 20th 2019
 - All statutory periodic tenancies, secure tenancies, assured tenancies and protected tenancies in place on March 20th 2019 and up to 12 months after
- There is no specific definition in the Act of 'fit for habitation', but the Act sets out examples of fitness for habitation that include:
 - General state of repair
 - Freedom from dam
 - Natural lighting
 - Water supply
 - Proper ventilation
 - Absence of hazards that pose a health and/or safety risk
- The Act applies both to the specific residential dwelling named in the tenancy and to any common areas also owned by the landlord, such as shared hallways or entrances.

About this study...

OnePoll surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,000 UK adults who are in rented accommodation or have rented in the past on behalf of Aspect, between 08/03/2019 and 12/03/2019. OnePoll are members of the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research and employ members of the Marketing Research Society.

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