

Where in the UK is the Most Damp?

Haringey is the UK area with the highest incidence of damp, recording the highest rate of complaints nationally per 10,000 homes, followed closely by Hammersmith & Fulham, and Lambeth respectively.

Region	Key Areas	Why
London Boroughs	Haringey, Hammersmith & Fulham, Lambeth, Lewisham, Camden, Islington, Southwark	High-density housing, older property stock, and a large private rented sector (where 9% of homes have damp). Overcrowding and poor ventilation exacerbate condensation issues.
North West England	Rochdale, Manchester, Oldham, West Lancashire, Blackburn, Gateshead	Aging housing stock, higher poverty rates, and colder climate. Rochdale gained national attention after the mould-related death of toddler Awaab Ishak
Yorkshire & The Humber	Leeds, Sheffield, Kirklees, Bradford	High rates of non-decent homes (poor insulation, structural defects) and a large private rented sector. Kirklees Council faced regulatory action for backlogged damp repairs

This report addresses the critical issue of damp and mould prevalence within towns across England.

The analysis synthesizes data from a variety of sources, including reports from housing ombudsmen, government surveys, news media, housing charities, tenant advocacy groups, environmental health reports from local councils, and academic research. The findings reveal a significant and widespread problem, with certain regions and urban areas exhibiting a higher prevalence of reported damp and mould.

London boroughs, particularly Haringey, Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth, and Lewisham, consistently appear as hotspots based on housing ombudsman complaint data. Regions such as Yorkshire and the Humber, and the North West, also demonstrate concerning levels of damp and mould, especially within the private rented sector. While a precise ranking of the top 50 towns is challenging due to data limitations and methodological variations across sources, this report identifies numerous towns and cities that consistently emerge as having substantial issues. These problems are often linked to factors such as condensation arising from inadequate heating and ventilation, structural defects in properties, and insufficient insulation.

The impact of damp and mould on residents is considerable, encompassing a range of health issues, including respiratory problems and allergies, as well as adverse effects on mental well-being and the overall quality of life.

The Growing Concern of Damp and Mould in English Towns

The issue of damp and mould in housing across the United Kingdom has garnered increasing attention in recent years. This heightened concern is partly fuelled by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which has made it more difficult for households to afford adequate heating, potentially exacerbating conditions that lead to damp and mould growth. Furthermore, the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in 2020, directly linked to prolonged exposure to damp and mould in his home, has significantly raised public and regulatory awareness of the severe health risks associated with

these conditions. This event has underscored the urgent need for a better understanding of the prevalence and impact of damp and mould in homes across England.

The presence of damp and mould in residential properties is not merely an aesthetic concern; it poses significant risks to the health and well-being of occupants. Exposure to damp and mould can trigger or worsen a variety of health problems, including respiratory issues such as asthma and bronchitis, allergic reactions, and other conditions. Beyond physical health, living in damp and mouldy conditions can also have detrimental effects on mental health, contributing to stress, anxiety, and depression. The financial implications are also substantial, with the National Health Service (NHS) estimating that millions could be saved annually if damp problems were effectively rectified.

In response to the growing concerns, this report aims to identify the top 50 towns in England where damp and mould issues are most prevalent. This analysis will draw upon a comprehensive review of available data from various sources, including reports on housing conditions, government surveys, news articles, information from housing charities and tenant advocacy groups, environmental health reports from local councils, and academic research. It is important to acknowledge from the outset that achieving a definitive ranking of the top 50 towns may be challenging due to limitations in data availability, inconsistencies in reporting methodologies across different sources, and the fact that much of the data is aggregated at the local authority level rather than for specific towns. Nevertheless, this report will strive to identify towns that consistently appear as having significant problems with damp and mould based on the available evidence.

National Prevalence of Damp and Mould in Housing

Understanding the scale of damp and mould issues in England requires an examination of national prevalence statistics. Estimates on the number of homes affected vary, with some reports suggesting that between 4% and 27% of homes in England have problems with damp and mould. This wide range highlights the challenges in accurately measuring and reporting these issues due to differing definitions and survey methodologies. However, the English Housing Survey (EHS) provides a more consistent data source. According to the 2022-23 EHS, approximately 4% of households in England reported living in a home with damp. This figure increased to 5% in the 2023 survey, indicating a potential worsening of the situation. Notably, the private rented sector consistently shows a higher prevalence, with 9% of private rented homes affected by damp in 2023.

Other data further emphasize the significant challenges faced by renters. Over half (58%) of privately rented households in England are estimated to experience damp, mould, or excessive cold. Overall, around 8% of all homes in England are thought to have some form of damp problem. In comparison, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) estimates that between 3% and 4% of social homes in England have notable amounts of dampness and mould. While the prevalence in social housing is lower than in the private rented sector, it still represents a substantial number of properties and residents affected. Within social housing, a small but concerning percentage of properties are classified as having serious category two or even category one damp and mould hazards, posing an immediate threat to health.

The impact of damp and mould is not evenly distributed across the population. People living in private or social rented housing are more likely to experience these issues than owner-occupiers. The 2022-23 EHS data reveals that 10% of private renters lived in damp homes, compared to 7% of local authority renters, 4% of housing association renters, and just 2% of owner-occupiers. Furthermore, households with dependent children and those where a member has a long-term illness or disability are also more likely to reside in poor-quality homes with damp. Analysis by ethnicity also indicates disparities, with certain ethnic minority groups, such as Mixed White and

Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Black African, and Pakistani households, reporting higher rates of damp compared to White British households. These statistics underscore that damp and mould in housing contribute to existing health inequalities and disproportionately affect vulnerable segments of the population.

Regional Distribution of Damp and Mould Issues Across England

Examining the regional distribution of housing quality and damp prevalence provides further insights into the towns most affected. The 2022-23 English Housing Survey found variations in the proportion of non-decent dwellings across different regions of England. The North West, East Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, and the South West exhibited a greater proportion of non-decent homes overall compared to other regions. Notably, Yorkshire and the Humber, and the North West have been consistently identified as having the worst housing conditions in England, with particularly high rates of damp and mould reported in private rented homes within these regions. For instance, analysis has shown that private rented homes in Yorkshire and the Humber have significantly higher rates of damp and mould compared to the national average.

While the English Housing Survey primarily provides regional data, specific towns and cities within these regions have also been highlighted in relation to damp and mould issues. Rochdale, located in the North West, gained significant attention due to the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, bringing the severe consequences of prolonged exposure to mould into sharp focus. This case, while specific to Rochdale, underscores the potential for severe damp and mould problems within the broader North West region, which is already indicated by the higher regional prevalence statistics.

Identifying Towns with High Prevalence of Damp and Mould: An Analysis of Available Data

Pinpointing the exact top 50 towns with the highest prevalence of damp and mould requires a detailed analysis of various data sources, keeping in mind the inherent limitations of each.

Analysis of Housing Ombudsman Complaints Data

Data from the “Mouldy Nation Report 2025” offers valuable insights into areas with high levels of damp and mould complaints reported to the Housing Ombudsman. This report provides a ranking of local authorities based on the number of complaints per 10,000 housing units. Topping this list is Haringey in London, with a significantly higher rate of complaints compared to other areas. Following closely are other London boroughs, including Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth, and Lewisham, indicating a substantial issue with damp and mould complaints across these urban areas. Further down the list, but still within the top ten, are other London boroughs such as Camden, Islington, and Southwark, suggesting that damp and mould are widespread concerns in the capital. Interestingly, the top ten also includes areas outside of London, namely Adur and Lewes, demonstrating that this problem is not confined to major cities and affects various communities across England. Additionally, the report highlights that West Northamptonshire experienced a dramatic year-on-year increase in damp and mould complaints, suggesting a rapidly emerging or escalating issue in this area. It is important to note that complaint data may be influenced by factors beyond just the prevalence of damp and mould, such as tenant awareness of reporting mechanisms and the responsiveness of landlords and local authorities in recording complaints.

Insights from the English Housing Survey and Government Data

While the English Housing Survey provides valuable data on the national and regional prevalence of damp, it does not typically offer a detailed breakdown at the specific town level within its headline findings. However, the survey's findings that the private rented sector has the highest rates of damp, coupled with the Ombudsman complaint data showing London boroughs as hotspots, suggest a correlation between urban areas with a high proportion of private rentals and a greater likelihood of damp and mould issues. Government bodies like the Regulator of Social Housing have also conducted investigations and issued findings related to specific local authorities. For example, the London Borough of Lewisham was found to be failing to meet consumer standards, with issues including a significant number of overdue repairs and an inadequate approach to assessing reports of damp and mould. Similarly, Kirklees Council in West Yorkshire received a regulatory notice for failing to meet consumer standards, partly due to a substantial backlog of overdue damp and mould repairs. These regulatory actions highlight specific local authorities where systemic problems with damp and mould management exist.

Evidence from News Articles and Local Media Reports

News articles and local media reports across England provide anecdotal evidence and often focus on specific instances of severe damp and mould affecting residents. These reports offer a glimpse into the lived experiences of individuals in various towns and cities. A review of the provided snippets reveals numerous locations where damp and mould have been highlighted as significant concerns. In London, various boroughs mentioned in the Ombudsman data, such as Haringey, Lambeth, and Lewisham, also feature in news reports detailing the struggles of residents living with these conditions. Yorkshire, particularly areas like Leeds, Sheffield, and Kirklees, has seen substantial news coverage regarding council failings and the high prevalence of unfit homes plagued by damp and mould. The North West, including Manchester, Oldham, and Rochdale, has also been frequently mentioned in the context of damp and mould, often linked to the tragic case of Awaab Ishak and broader issues within both social and private rented housing. The East Midlands, with towns like Stoke-on-Trent and West Northamptonshire, has also featured in reports of Ombudsman criticism and significant increases in complaints. In the South West, Cornwall and Bristol have seen news coverage related to rising complaints and issues in both social and private rented accommodation. Birmingham in the West Midlands has been the focus of reports detailing efforts to address damp and mould in social housing. Additionally, Gateshead in Tyne and Wear has been mentioned in relation to a significant number of damp and mould cases in council housing. It is important to remember that news coverage often focuses on the most severe cases or areas with active campaigning, which might not provide a comprehensive picture of overall prevalence.

Findings from Housing Charities and Tenant Advocacy Groups

Housing charities and tenant advocacy groups play a crucial role in highlighting the issues faced by residents living with damp and mould. Organizations like Shelter and Citizens Advice have produced numerous reports and guidance materials on this topic, confirming the widespread nature of the problem across England. They often report on regional variations, with Citizens Advice noting higher rates in Yorkshire and the North West. Specific examples of towns and cities with significant concerns are frequently raised by these groups. For instance, Tenant Support Helpline has highlighted issues in Manchester. The fact that Peabody, a large housing association operating in East London, is facing collective legal action from tenants over damp and mould issues underscores the severity of the problem in certain areas. These organizations often act as a voice for tenants, providing valuable insights into the areas most affected by damp and mould.

Environmental Health Reports and Local Council Data

Environmental health reports and data published by local councils offer a more localized perspective on damp and mould issues. Several councils mentioned in the snippets have acknowledged the problem and outlined their approaches to tackling it. Haringey Council, which tops the list for Ombudsman complaints, provides extensive information and resources for tenants dealing with damp and mould. Hammersmith and Fulham Council has a specific policy on damp and mould and outlines the process for investigating reported cases. Lambeth Council has been subject to Housing Ombudsman investigations related to its handling of damp and mould complaints. Lewisham Council's failure to meet regulatory consumer standards was partly attributed to issues with damp and mould, leading to increased scrutiny. Camden Council has proactively addressed the issue by implementing a new, user-friendly system for residents to report damp and mould problems. Islington Council has published reports detailing its efforts to tackle damp, condensation, and mould within its housing stock. Similarly, Southwark Council provides a reporting form for damp and mould and has been the subject of Ombudsman decisions regarding its handling of these issues. Outside of London, Adur and Lewes Councils (part of Adur & Worthing Council and Lewes & Eastbourne Councils respectively) offer guidance to residents on dealing with damp and mould. The City of London Corporation has contacted its residents offering advice and has been reviewing its procedures for handling damp and mould reports. In other regions, Bristol City Council has seen a significant number of Freedom of Information requests related to damp and mould in both private rented and social housing. Leeds City Council has established a dedicated damp and mould team to address the issue. Gateshead Council has recorded a substantial number of damp and mould cases within its council-owned properties. Birmingham City Council is actively working to address damp and mould through a £15 million program. West Lancashire Council has undertaken checks on thousands of homes to identify damp and mould problems. Blackburn with Darwen Council has launched a campaign to raise awareness and provide support to residents affected by damp and mould. Kirklees Council in West Yorkshire has faced regulatory action due to a high number of overdue repairs related to damp and mould. Stoke-on-Trent City Council in the East Midlands has been criticized by the Housing Ombudsman for its failures in addressing damp and mould issues affecting vulnerable residents. North Tyneside Council has recently introduced a new policy specifically aimed at combating condensation, damp, and mould in its properties. This overview of local council data indicates that damp and mould are recognized as significant issues in numerous towns and cities across England, prompting various responses and levels of intervention from local authorities.

Academic Research on Geographical Distribution

Academic research provides further insights into the broader trends and impacts of damp and mould in English housing, although specific town-level data may be less common. Studies have highlighted the considerable burden of respiratory illnesses in England that can be attributed to residential exposure to damp and mould, with evidence suggesting that ethnic minority and disadvantaged groups are disproportionately affected. Research analysing the English House Condition Survey has indicated that the prevalence of damp in English housing has remained relatively stable at around 4% for over a decade, with the private rented sector consistently showing the highest incidence. While academic research may not pinpoint specific towns with the highest prevalence, it reinforces the understanding that damp and mould are persistent issues, particularly affecting vulnerable populations and those in the private rented sector, which are often concentrated in urban areas.

Factors Contributing to Damp and Mould Prevalence in Identified Towns

The prevalence of damp and mould in the identified towns is driven by a combination of interconnected factors. Condensation is frequently cited as a primary cause, often resulting from inadequate heating and ventilation within properties. This issue is often exacerbated by fuel poverty, where residents struggle to afford sufficient heating, leading to colder internal surfaces where moisture in the air can condense. Structural defects in buildings, such as leaking roofs, faulty guttering, and rising damp due to inadequate damp-proof courses, also contribute significantly to the problem. Furthermore, inadequate insulation in homes can lead to cold spots and increased condensation.

The prevalence of these contributing factors can vary across different towns. For instance, towns with a higher proportion of older housing stock, such as those found in regions like Yorkshire and the North West, may be more susceptible to structural damp issues and have poorer levels of insulation compared to newer properties. London, with its high housing density and a significant proportion of privately rented properties, may experience more condensation-related problems due to overcrowding and potentially less rigorous enforcement of housing standards in some parts of the private rental sector. The age and condition of the housing stock in areas like Gateshead may also explain the higher number of reported cases. Understanding these underlying causes in the context of specific towns is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent and remediate damp and mould.

The Impact of Damp and Mould on Residents' Health and Well-being

Living in homes affected by damp and mould has significant consequences for the health and overall well-being of residents. The health impacts are diverse and can range from relatively mild symptoms to severe and chronic conditions. Exposure to mould spores can trigger allergic reactions, leading to symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes, and skin rashes. Damp and mould are also known to exacerbate respiratory conditions like asthma, increasing the frequency and severity of attacks. Furthermore, prolonged exposure can increase the risk of developing respiratory infections, bronchitis, and pneumonia. In severe cases, such as that of Awaab Ishak, prolonged exposure to damp and mould can even be fatal. Certain groups are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of damp and mould, including babies and children, older people, and individuals with pre-existing respiratory conditions or weakened immune systems.

Beyond the direct physical health impacts, damp and mould can also significantly affect residents' mental and emotional well-being. Living in unpleasant and unhealthy conditions can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and even depression. The presence of damp and mould can also cause damage to personal belongings, leading to further frustration and financial strain. Some residents report feeling self-conscious or experiencing social stigma due to the damp and mould in their homes. The persistent nature of these issues and the often slow or inadequate responses from landlords can contribute to feelings of helplessness and a decline in overall quality of life.

Challenges and Limitations in Determining a Precise Top 50

Ranking

Determining a precise ranking of the top 50 towns in England with prevalent damp and mould issues faces several significant challenges and limitations due to the nature of the available data. One major limitation is the inconsistency in reporting across different sources. Government surveys, housing ombudsman data, news articles, and reports from charities and local councils often use different methodologies for data collection and may focus on different aspects of the problem (e.g., prevalence vs. complaints). For instance, the English Housing Survey provides prevalence estimates but not at a detailed town level, while Ombudsman data reflects complaints, which may not correlate perfectly with the actual prevalence of damp and mould.

Another challenge is that much of the available data is aggregated at the local authority level rather than for specific towns within those authorities. This makes it difficult to isolate individual towns with high prevalence, especially in larger local authority areas that encompass multiple towns. News articles and charity reports often provide valuable insights into specific locations, but these are typically anecdotal or focused on particular cases, making it hard to draw broader conclusions about the overall prevalence in a town.

Furthermore, the definition of “prevalent” can be subjective and may vary across different studies and reports. What one source considers a significant issue might not meet the threshold for another. Data on private rented accommodation, where prevalence is often higher, may be less systematically collected and reported compared to social housing data, which is subject to more regulatory oversight.

Given these limitations, achieving a definitive and statistically rigorous ranking of the top 50 towns based solely on the provided research snippets is not feasible. Instead, the focus of this report is on identifying towns and cities that consistently emerge as having significant issues with damp and mould based on converging evidence from various sources. This approach acknowledges the data limitations while still providing a valuable overview of the areas where damp and mould are likely to be most problematic.

Conclusion: Key Towns with Significant Damp and Mould Issues

Based on the analysis of the provided research material, several towns and cities across England consistently appear as having significant issues with damp and mould. While a precise ranking of the top 50 is not possible due to data limitations, the following areas demonstrate a high prevalence of reported problems across various data sources:

Town/Borough	Source Type	Evidence
Haringey	Ombudsman Complaints, News	Tops the list for Ombudsman complaints per 10,000 homes; featured in news reports.
Hammersmith and Fulham	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health	High number of Ombudsman complaints; has a council policy on damp and mould.
Lambeth	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health, News	High number of Ombudsman complaints; subject of Ombudsman investigations; featured in news reports.

Town/Borough	Source Type	Evidence
Lewisham	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health, News, Regulation	High number of Ombudsman complaints; failing to meet regulatory standards partly due to damp and mould; featured in news reports.
Camden	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health	Notable number of Ombudsman complaints; implemented a new reporting system for damp and mould.
Islington	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health	Considerable number of Ombudsman complaints; council has reported on efforts to address the issue.
Southwark	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health	Significant number of Ombudsman complaints; provides a reporting form for damp and mould.
Adur	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health	Among the top 10 for Ombudsman complaints; council provides advice on damp and mould.
Lewes	Ombudsman Complaints, Environmental Health	Among the top 10 for Ombudsman complaints; council provides advice on damp and mould.
West Northamptonshire	Ombudsman Complaints	Experienced a dramatic year-on-year increase in Ombudsman complaints.
Leeds	News, Environmental Health, Tenant Advocacy	Featured in news reports regarding high rates in Yorkshire; has a dedicated council team and advice resources.
Sheffield	News	Featured in news reports regarding council failings in Yorkshire.
Kirklees	News, Regulation	Featured in news reports regarding council failings; subject to regulatory action for overdue repairs.
Manchester	News, Tenant Advocacy	Frequently mentioned in news reports and by tenant advocacy groups as having significant issues.
Oldham	News	Featured in news reports detailing severe conditions in temporary housing.
Rochdale	News	Site of the tragic Awaab Ishak case, highlighting severe mould issues.
Stoke-on-Trent	News, Regulation	Criticized by the Ombudsman for failures in addressing damp and mould.
Cornwall	News	Experienced a record high in Ombudsman complaints related to damp and mould.
Birmingham	News, Environmental Health	Has a program to address damp and mould in social housing; featured in news reports detailing severe conditions.
Gateshead	News, Environmental Health	Recorded a significant number of damp and mould cases in council housing.
Bristol	News, Environmental Health, Tenant Advocacy	Featured in news reports regarding issues in student housing and council properties; high number of FOI requests.

This table highlights towns and London boroughs that have shown a significant prevalence of damp and mould issues across the analysed data. It is crucial to understand that this is not a definitive top 20, let alone a top 50, ranking, but rather an identification of areas where the problem is demonstrably significant based on the available information. Further, more granular data would be required to establish a precise ranking of the 50 towns in England with the most prevalent damp and

mould issues.

Recommendations for Further Action and Research

To effectively address the pervasive issue of damp and mould in English towns, a multi-faceted approach involving policymakers, local authorities, and housing providers is essential. Standardized data collection on damp and mould at the town level should be implemented to provide a more accurate and granular understanding of the problem's geographical distribution. Increased funding is needed for social housing maintenance and energy efficiency upgrades to tackle the root causes of damp and mould. Regulations and enforcement within the private rented sector should be strengthened to ensure landlords meet their responsibilities in providing safe and healthy homes. Improving tenant awareness of their rights and the available reporting mechanisms is also crucial to ensure that issues are identified and addressed promptly. Further research is necessary to understand the specific factors contributing to high prevalence in the identified towns, allowing for more targeted and effective interventions. By prioritizing prevention, ensuring early intervention when problems arise, and implementing effective remediation strategies, it is possible to create healthier living environments for residents across England.