



Private Sector Housing Hazard Fact Sheet

PERSONAL HYGIENE, SANITATION & DRAINAGE



Who we are and what we do:

Private Sector Housing are responsible for making sure that properties both owner occupied and privately rented comply with Housing law and standards to protect customers from hazards of poor housing.

To achieve this we will assess dwellings under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to evaluate any potential risks to health and safety from any deficiencies found. The more common hazards that we come across in dwellings are damp and mould growth; excess cold; crowding and space; entry by intruders; **personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage**; falling on the level; falling on stairs; falling between levels; fire; and structural collapse and falling elements. If significant hazards are identified in privately rented properties which are attributable to the condition of the property, then we may require remedial action by landlords to reduce or eliminate the risk from these hazards.

The intention of our fact sheets is to help you understand what we are looking for and, where possible, to identify areas where landlords and tenants may be able to help minimise or reduce risk.

Health effects

This fact sheet covers threats of infection and threats to mental health associated with personal hygiene, including personal washing and clothes washing facilities, sanitation and drainage.

The threats to health from both poor personal hygiene and poor sanitation include gastro-intestinal illness, and, more rarely, skin infections. Illnesses resulting from gastro-intestinal infection can range from mild stomach upsets through to death from diarrhoea and gastro-intestinal disease, and severe dysentery, and gastro-enteritis.

Although not a direct cause of physical illness, odours associated with poor hygiene, the visual appearance of facilities which are difficult to clean or have stained surfaces, damaged decoration and furnishings resulting from splashing or leaking appliances or drainage, can be a cause of stress and depression. This is particularly the case where the occupant has little control over the situation, typically in rented accommodation and where facilities are shared. As well as causing anxiety and depression, it can also cause tension between people sharing facilities.

Causes

The greatest risks tend to arise from the sharing of facilities and personal hygiene behaviour, rather than from the design and facilities provided. However, where there are deficiencies with the facilities themselves, this can clearly increase the risk. It seems that the major risk of spread of disease via the faecal-oral route is transfer by hands through contact with the seat or the basin. The flushing action may spread some organisms in aerosol form, but, providing wall surfaces are dry, this is not considered a main route of infection.



An insufficient number of sanitary closets for the number of occupants will increase the risk of spread of pathogens, particularly if the closets are shared by two or more dwellings when responsibility for cleaning may be confused.

Discharge of untreated foul waste onto paths or gardens will introduce faecal contamination, with associated micro-organisms, create offensive odours, and may attract pests. If there are any air leaks to drains these will be offensive. Waste water discharged onto paths and gardens, if allowed to accumulate and stagnate, will be a source of offensive smells, and may attract pests.

What preventative measures can landlords and home owners take?

Ensure that water closet basins have a smooth and impervious surface (such as vitreous china) and be self – cleansing. They should be connected to a proper working flushing cistern provided with a supply of water, and also properly connected to a drain capable of safely carrying waste out of the dwelling and into the drainage system. The design of the basin should ensure there is a water seal of adequate depth to prevent foul air escape from the system. It should be securely fixed and capable of carrying the weight of users. It should be fitted with a hinged seat and hinged lid of impervious material. The operating lever to the flushing cistern should be of impervious and readily cleansable material to limit the possibility of the spread of pathogens from one user to the next (the cistern usually being used before hands are washed).

Provide a sufficient number of sanitary closets for the occupants. The number of sanitary closets should be related to the number of levels in the dwelling and to the number of persons (irrespective of age). There should be a sufficient number of wash hand basins for the occupants or potential occupants, with separate supplies of cold water and hot water over each basin. Each wash hand basin should be sited so as to encourage and facilitate use, with a basin within each room containing a WC and in every bath or shower room.

Provide a sufficient number of baths or showers for the occupants or potential occupants. Each bath or shower should be stable and properly and securely fitted. They should be connected to a supply of water at a controlled temperature or to supplies of hot and cold water. They should also be properly connected to pipes which safely carry away the waste water to discharge it into the drainage system.

Ensure that each bath or shower is sited in a properly designed bathroom which is suitably heated, with adequate light and ventilation. The bathroom should be provided with a door which is capable of allowing privacy.

Sinks will be used for hand washing of clothes as well as for food preparation and for washing up kitchen and eating equipment. Ensure that the internal surfaces of the sink are smooth, impervious, and capable of being cleansed and maintained in a hygienic condition. Cracks, chips or other damage to the internal surface may prevent thorough cleansing.

What preventative measures can tenants and owner occupiers take?

Good hygiene practices, hand washing in particular, will go along way to prevent infection along with regular and thorough cleaning of toilets, wash hand basins, sinks baths and showers.

Report any leaks from or blockages to waste drainage to your landlord or managing agent at you earliest opportunity. Where sewerage has spilled or leaked from pipes or drainage or have occurred, urgent action should be taken this will present a greater risk to health.

Other useful contacts and sources:

Website: <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/privatesectorhousing> - Private Sector Housing pages for Homeowners, Landlords and tenants

Regulations *Approved Document G: Hygiene, Approved Document H: Drainage and waste disposal*, and British Standards *BS 6465 Sanitary installations Parts I and II*, and *BS 8000 Part 13: Workmanship on building sites. Code of practice for above ground drainage and sanitary appliances.*

Colchester Borough Council's Building Control Section at building.control@colchester.gov.uk or by telephoning 01206 282436

Building Regulations Part A and *Approved Document*

Private Sector Housing

Colchester Borough Council

Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester CO3 3WG

Telephone: Customer Service Centre on 01206 282581 and select Option 6

Fax: 01206 282598

Email: housing.private@colchester.gov.uk