Dampness in buildings and health: Nordic interdisciplinary review of the scientific evidence on associations between exposure to "dampness" in buildings and health effects (NORDDAMP)

Several epidemiological investigations concerning indoor environments have indicated that "dampness" in buildings is associated to health effects such as respiratory symptoms, asthma and allergy. The aim of the present interdisciplinary review is to evaluate this association as shown in the epidemiological literature. A literature search identified 590 peer-reviewed articles of which 61 have been the foundation for this review. The review shows that "dampness" in buildings appears to increase the risk for health effects in the airways, such as cough, wheeze and asthma. Relative risks are in the range of OR 1.4-2.2. There also seems to be an association between "dampness" and other symptoms such as tiredness, headache and airways infections. It is concluded that the evidence for a causal association between "dampness" and health effects is strong. However, the mechanisms are unknown. Several definitions of dampness have been used in the studies, but all seems to be associated with health problems. Sensitisation to mites may be one but obviously not the only mechanism. Even if the mechanisms are unknown, there is sufficient evidence to take preventive measures against dampness in buildings.