

Healthy Homes Standards

New healthy homes standards for rental properties in New Zealand became law from 1 July 2019. The standards will play a significant role in improving the wellbeing of New Zealanders and their families.

Why is this important?

Nearly 600,000 households rent in New Zealand, and research¹ tells us that rental properties are poorer quality than owner-occupied homes. The research shows a link between cold, damp and mouldy homes and negative health outcomes, particularly for illnesses such as asthma and cardiovascular conditions.

By improving the quality of rental homes, New Zealanders who rent will experience improved health, as well as lower medical costs and lower levels of hospitalisations. Warmer and drier homes are also less likely to have issues with mould or mildew damage, which better protects a landlord's investment.

What is the main information that I need to know?

The healthy homes standards incorporate five aspects of a property, which all contribute to a warm and dry home.

Heating

All rental properties must have one or more fixed heaters, which can directly heat the main living room and meet a required heating capacity. Certain heating devices that are inefficient, unaffordable or unhealthy will not meet the requirements of this standard. A heating assessment tool is provided at [tenancy.govt.nz/heating-tool](https://www.tenancy.govt.nz/heating-tool), which provides a report that shows the minimum heating capacity required. It can be used to check if current heating is sufficient to meet the standard, or if it is necessary to install a new heater.

Insulation

Ceiling and underfloor insulation has been compulsory in all rental homes since 1 July 2019, where it is reasonably practicable² to install. Underfloor insulation needs a minimum R-value* of 1.3. Existing ceiling insulation may need to be topped up or replaced if it is not in a reasonable condition, and in most situations, existing ceiling insulation needs to be at least 120mm thick. If ceiling insulation needs to be topped up, it needs to meet minimum R-values as set out in the 2008 Building Code.

* 'R' stands for resistance – an R-value is a measure of how well insulation resists heat flow.

Ventilation

Rental properties must have at least one door or window (including skylights) that opens to the outside in all bedrooms, dining rooms, living rooms, lounges and kitchens. The openable windows and doors must have a total area of at least 5% of the floor area in each respective room. The windows or doors must be able to be fixed in the open position.

All kitchens and bathrooms must have an extractor fan that ventilates externally.

Moisture ingress and drainage

Rental properties must have efficient drainage for the removal of storm water, surface water and ground water, including an appropriate outfall. The drainage system must include gutters, downpipes and drains for the removal of water from the roof.

If the rental property has an enclosed subfloor, a ground moisture barrier must be installed if it is reasonably practicable² to do so.

Draught stopping

Landlords must block any unreasonable gaps and holes in walls, ceilings, windows, floors and doors that cause noticeable draughts. Open fireplaces must be blocked unless the tenant and landlord agree otherwise.

There are some exemptions that apply to each of these standards, and there are also general exemptions that may apply to some rental homes. Further information about exemptions is available on the Tenancy Services website at www.tenancy.govt.nz/healthy-homes/exemptions-to-the-healthy-homes-standards/

1 Oliver J, Foster T, Kvalsvig A, Williamson DA, Baker MG, Pierse N. (2017) 'Risk of rehospitalisation and death for vulnerable New Zealand children'. Archives of Diseases in Childhood: doi: 10.1136/archdischild-2017-312671.

2 It is not reasonably practicable to install something if a professional installer can't access the area without:

- carrying out substantial building work, or
- causing substantial damage to the property, or
- creating greater risks to a person's health and safety than is normally acceptable, or
- it is otherwise not reasonably practicable for a professional installer to carry out the work.

HEALTHY HOMES STANDARDS

What do I need to do first?

Both tenants and landlords should make themselves aware of these key dates.

Do now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign up to Tenancy Matters (go to tenancy.govt.nz/subscribe) and follow www.facebook.com/tenancynz to keep up-to-date with all tenancy-related information, including all of the details about the healthy homes standards.
From 1 July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ceiling and underfloor insulation became compulsory in all rental homes where it is reasonably practicable² to install. Landlords must include a signed statement with any new, varied or renewed tenancy agreement that they will comply, or already do comply, with the healthy homes standards. This statement is in addition to the existing requirement since 1 July 2016 to include a signed insulation statement with all new³ tenancy agreements that covers what insulation a property has, where it is, what type and what condition. Landlords must keep records that demonstrate compliance with any healthy homes standards that apply or will apply during the tenancy.
From 1 December 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landlords must include a statement of their current level of compliance with the healthy homes standards in any new or renewed tenancy agreement.³
From 1 July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private landlords must ensure their rental properties comply with the healthy homes standards within 90 days of any new, or renewed, tenancy. All boarding houses except Kāinga Ora (formerly Housing New Zealand) and Community Housing Provider boarding house tenancies must comply with the healthy homes standards.
From 1 July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Kāinga Ora (formerly Housing New Zealand) houses and registered Community Housing Provider houses must comply with the healthy homes standards.
From 1 July 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All rental homes must comply with the healthy homes standards.

What is my required insulation standard?

Insulation requirements under the healthy homes standards are measured by R-value. 'R' stands for resistance – how well insulation resists heat flow. The higher the R-value, the better the insulation. Minimum R-values vary across New Zealand, as shown on the map of climate zones.

Zone 1:
ceiling R 2.9,
underfloor R 1.3

Zone 2:
ceiling R 2.9,
underfloor R 1.3

Zone 3:
ceiling R 3.3,
underfloor R 1.3

Zone 1

Zone 2

Zone 3

Landlords can check if they need to upgrade insulation by using the online insulation tool at tenancy.govt.nz/insulation-tool.

Landlords can check the R-value of new or existing insulation by:

- > checking the product packaging
- > checking whether a product label is stapled to a beam in the ceiling or underfloor area
- > checking installation certificates, invoices or building records from the local council
- > consulting a professional insulation installer.

If the insulation was installed prior to 2016, its thickness can be assessed by manually measuring (existing ceiling insulation must be at least 120mm thick).

The Insulation Association of New Zealand (iaonz.co.nz) and the Energy Efficiency Conservation Authority (energywise.govt.nz) can help.

³ This may not apply to all tenancies. See tenancy.govt.nz/starting-a-tenancy/tenancy-agreements/ for a complete explanation of statements that must accompany tenancy agreements.