

Damp homes making residents ill

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Residents of Dolphin House protest dressed in biohazard suits to illustrate the problems with damp at the estate last year

More than nine out of 10 children living in a damp and mould-infested social housing complex have missed school this year due to sickness.

A survey of living conditions in Dolphin House, Dublin, found more than half the residents have suffered respiratory problems, stomach upsets or nausea - all of which have been linked to the poor conditions in the flats. The complex is owned by Dublin City Council.

One child living with his family in the Dolphin's Barn community has missed 26 days of school since January, due to sickness believed to be caused by mould growing up the walls of his home. His mother, Sinead Martin, said she is at her wits' end trying to cope with the damp, mould and sewage problems that have plagued her family since they moved into Dolphin House seven years ago. "It's just horrific to live like this, watching your children getting sick and not being able to do anything about," said Ms Martin.

Residents have complained of breathing difficulties, diarrhoea, skin rashes and depression due to the poor conditions in the flats. Council chiefs have pledged to improve the affected units and have already refurbished a number of the 436 flats in the complex, but tenants have called for complete regeneration.

Ms Martin, who lives with her partner, Paul Dempsey, and their two sons, Noel, nine, and Aaron, five, said the council and Government ministers need to take action before people become seriously ill. She and her partner, who pay 70 euro a week in rent to the council, are each on three different sets of medication. "My son Noel has missed 26 days of school because he's been so sick," said the 30-year-old. "He's been off school for the last two weeks with a gastric bug and he always has a headache. That's no way for a child to live. But it's all he's ever known."

Campaign group Rialto Rights In Action, which carried out the latest human rights monitoring report, said the living conditions are in breach of human rights under European law. The report, published on Tuesday, is the third since May 2010 and shows little improvement in the complex since. Debbie Mulhall, of Rialto Rights In Action, said the survey results are very worrying. "Most disturbing is the impact of the poor living conditions on children's school attendance," she said. "This highlights the detrimental knock-on effects of unsafe and unhealthy housing on a whole new generation of Dolphin residents."