

British toddler's death due to mold sparks outcry

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A two-year-old boy died from prolonged exposure to mold in his flat in northwest England, a coroner ruled on Tuesday, sparking demands for action over the problem in social housing.

Awaab Ishak died in December 2020 "as a result of a severe respiratory condition caused due to [prolonged exposure](#) to mold in his [home environment](#)," said coroner Joanne Kearsley.

"Action to treat and prevent the mold was not taken. His respiratory condition led to [respiratory arrest](#)," she added.

Ishak lived with parents Faisal Abdullah and Aisha Aminin in a one-bedroom [social housing](#) flat in Rochdale, Greater Manchester.

Faisal Abdullah had complained about the mold several times to Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH), the association that rented them the flat.

In her ruling, Kearsley said that "How, in the UK in 2020, does a two-year-old child die from exposure to mold in his home?"

"The tragic death of Awaab will and should be a defining moment for the housing sector in terms of increasing knowledge, increasing awareness and a deepening of understanding surrounding the issue of damp and mold," she added.

Coroner's inquests are held in England and Wales to try to establish the causes and circumstances of sudden or unexplained deaths based on the balance of probability.

They do not determine criminal or civil liability but set out facts in the public interest.

'Wake-up call'

Abdullah made his first complaint to RBH in 2017, and was advised to repaint over the mold, the inquest found.

"We cannot tell you how many [health professionals](#) we've cried in front of and Rochdale Boroughwide Housing staff we have pleaded to, expressing concern for the conditions ourselves and Awaab have been living in," his family said in a statement.

"We shouted out as loudly as we could, but despite making all of those efforts, every night we would be coming back to the same problem."

A medical visitor also raised the issue with RBH in July 2020, when Awaab was suffering from chronic respiratory problems.

"No action was taken and, from July 2020 until December 2020, Awaab continued to have chronic exposure to harmful mold," said Kearsley.

Awaab was taken to hospital on December 19 before being discharged, the court heard.

He deteriorated the next day and went into respiratory arrest and then [cardiac arrest](#) while being transferred to hospital.

Gareth Swarbrick, chief executive of RBH, said Awaab's death should

be a "wake-up call for everyone in housing, [social care](#) and health".

"We didn't recognize the level of risk to a little boy's health from the mold in the family's home," he said.

"We must make sure this can never happen again."

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