THE WATER CYCLE · PART 6 OF 8 · AGES 11–16

The Water Cycle in Everyday Life

You do not need a rain cloud to see the water cycle. Its processes happen every day in kitchens, gardens and car parks.

Washing drying on a line

Evaporation. Water in the clothes escapes into the air as invisible vapour. It is fastest on warm, dry, windy days, but frozen washing still dries slowly as ice turns to vapour.

Sweating to cool down

Evaporation takes heat. As sweat evaporates from your skin, it carries heat away. In very humid air less sweat evaporates, so you feel hotter.

A cold glass 'sweating'

Condensation. Invisible water vapour in the air touches the cold glass, cools and turns back into liquid droplets. The water comes from the air, not through the glass.

Misty glasses and car windows

Condensation. Step from a cool room into warm, humid air and your lenses fog up. In a car, moist breath condenses on the cold windows.

The white cloud above a kettle

Condensation. Boiling water makes invisible vapour. When it meets cooler air it condenses into tiny droplets, and those droplets are the white 'steam' you see.

Dew on the grass at dawn

Condensation. At night grass and leaves cool down. When they reach the dew point, water vapour in the air next to them condenses into drops of dew.

Frost on a car windscreen

Deposition. On a surface below 0 °C, water vapour can turn straight into ice crystals without becoming liquid first. The feathery white layer is frost.

Rain soaking into a lawn

Infiltration. Rain soaks into grass and soil, quickest in sandy soil. On roads and car parks it cannot soak in, so it runs off into drains instead.

Try it: catch a plant's water

Tie a clear plastic bag over a leafy branch of a plant in sunlight. Within about an hour, mist and droplets can appear inside. That is transpiration: vapour from the leaves condensing on the bag.

NEXT IN THE SERIES
7. Water Cycle Myths and the Real Science

Free to share · CC BY-NC 4.0 · Sources at infographhub.com