

# Coronavirus - COVID-19

## Housing Frequently Asked Questions

Updated – 7 April 2020

We hope that this document will help answer some of the most common questions that residents and families have asked.

We will regularly update you as and when the situations changes, and ensure this information is also available on our website.

### **What are the restrictions in place around friends and relatives visiting my retirement housing scheme?**

To help protect the health and safety of our residents and in line with government guidance, as from 23 March only essential visitors and colleagues should be visiting your building. These are:

- Carers (including family and friends if they are providing essential care for you)
- Local managers
- Health professionals
- Scheme cleaners
- Contractors undertaking emergency repairs
- Contractors/Homes First staff undertaking essential Health & Safety checks or servicing

### **What can I do to minimise the risk of infection?**

Everybody must stay at home, except for very limited purposes. People should only leave home to shop for basic essentials, collect prescriptions/medication, attend confirmed medical appointments, to do one form of exercise a day, to provide essential care for others and to travel to and from work where absolutely necessary. Non-essential shops have been ordered to close, and there is a ban on public gatherings of more than two people.

These reasons are exceptions – even when doing these activities, you should be minimising time spent outside of the home and ensuring you are 2 metres (over 6.5 feet) apart from anyone outside of your own household.

Continue to frequently wash your hands with soap and water (for at least 20 seconds) to stop the infection from spreading.

If you have received an NHS letter advising you to stay at home, you are self-isolating or you have symptoms you must not leave your home.

Please refer to the most current NHS advice <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>  
**Hand washing and respiratory hygiene**

There are general principles you can follow to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- washing your hands more often - with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitiser when you get home or into work, when you blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid contact with people who have symptoms
- cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash your hands
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home
- Where possible try to avoid touching door handles, railings etc. in the communal areas and if you do touch them ensure you wash your hands afterwards.

### **Retirement Housing Advisors are now working off site to help reduce the number of visitors to our schemes, how can I get help and support during this time?**

The health and safety of our residents remains paramount. You can contact the Retirement Housing Advisors by emailing them or ringing their office number, (which will then be diverted to their mobile phone). You will be able to speak to them directly or leave a message and they will return your call.

### **Can I 'Opt in' to receiving a Check Call if I haven't previously agreed this?**

Your Retirement Housing Advisor (RHA) will be happy to review this with you during office hours and make immediate arrangements for you to receive this service. Check calls take place in the mornings via the lifeline call system installed in all of the retirement housing properties. This system is linked to your pull cords and pendant, the door entry and the fire alarm system. During office hours your RHA will usually respond to your contact unless unavailable in which case the system is diverted to WEL. If the RHA is 'off site' or outside of office hours and during the weekend, the call system is responded to by Wealden and Eastbourne Lifeline (WEL). The pull cords are predominantly to be used for emergencies but you can also use this to speak to the WEL operator if you are unsure whether or not you need urgent medical assistance, you can also use it to leave an urgent message for your RHA to receive the following weekday morning for example.

During the current national emergency, the team will be contacting you more regularly and encouraging all residents to receive a check call on weekdays if they are not already receiving this service. Over the weekend or Bank Holiday periods tenants in Eastbourne, retirement housing will continue to receive calls from WEL. In Lewes where we do not currently have this service, we have a group of volunteers who are providing an additional welfare call in these difficult times.

### **What happens if I don't answer my check call?**

If you fail to respond to an arranged call and we are unable to make contact with you to establish you are ok, we will contact your next of kin in the first instance. If we are still unable to establish you are safe and well we will contact the emergency services on the assumption that you are in need of urgent assistance. Please be especially mindful of this to avoid unnecessary calls to the emergency services at this time by responding to your calls or contacting WEL to advise you are safe and do not require a call.

### **Will my carer still be able to come to the property?**

Yes. If you have a carer, they should continue their visits following government guidance to minimise any risk of infection. If your normal carer fails to arrive, please contact your Retirement Housing Advisor who can alert the care agency and the local authority safeguarding team.

### **Can I use the communal areas, such as the lounge, laundries and gardens during this period of social distancing?**

Following the introduction of more stringent government measures to limit people's movement, we have taken the decision to close all communal lounges, games rooms, quiet rooms, dining rooms and kitchens.

This decision has not been taken lightly and we understand that social interaction can help boost residents' well-being; however our priority is to keep residents safe during these unprecedented times.

Laundries remain open, but we are asking residents to respect the rotas that have been introduced for your safety and the safety of other residents. When going to and from the laundry room please maintain social distancing guidelines and keep two metres apart and ensure you follow the additional guidance we have provided.

Mobility Scooter store rooms can still be accessed for essential use but continue to be mindful of hygiene and distancing instructions

Lifts can continue to be used but as they are generally small enclosed spaces, please follow the guidelines to access them alone or with a member of your household.

Gardens are open to use for fresh air but please ensure you keep your 2 meter distance at all times.

If you have symptoms of a persistent cough or a raised temperature you must not use the laundry or the gardens. If you do develop these symptoms we ask that you notify a member of the team and remain in your property for a period of seven days if you live alone.

If you live with another adult and one of you has symptoms of coronavirus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for **14 days**. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

### **Is there any support available to help me with shopping, supplies, collecting medication, dog walking etc. as I do not have any local friends or family to support?**

Your Retirement Housing Advisor will be able to signpost you to our Community Hub and other local solutions.

### **What happens if I run out of food or need help with collecting medicines?**

Many high street shops and food and drink businesses are still operating. Smaller businesses which offer delivery can usually respond more quickly than the big supermarkets, and often have

items that are out of stock elsewhere. Some chemists are also offering a delivery service for medications.

Ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services. If this is not possible, then you can access support via the Community Hub which has now been set up to support members of our community who are vulnerable and isolated to provide them with the support they need to allow them to stay at home. If you are classified as "extremely vulnerable" under the government's definition, **please register online at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>** or ask your Retirement Housing Advisor to assist you with this.

To enable our Community Hub to provide timely support to those members of our community most in need, we are prioritising those who have an imminent or urgent need for assistance. Please consider if your request for support falls into this category. If it does not, we ask that you contact us online or by phone nearer to the time the support is needed.

### **What should you do if you have hospital and GP appointments during this period?**

We advise everyone to access medical assistance remotely, wherever possible. However, if you have a scheduled hospital or other medical appointment during this period, talk to your GP or clinician to ensure you continue to receive the care you need and consider whether appointments can be postponed or need to be referred to alternate surgeries with specialist facilities.

### **Will communal areas still be cleaned as normal?**

We have increased the cleaning of the communal areas to try and limit the spread of infection. The cleaners are focusing on the touch points as a priority, door handles, door entry pads, railings etc. where the risk is greater. We will endeavour to continue with this increased cleaning regime but this is dependent on the contractor's staffing resources.

### **If there is a confirmed case of Coronavirus at my location, what will happen?**

To reduce the risk of transmission, we will reinforce the need for the tenants to self-isolate and notify WEL so they are aware in case of emergency. The enhanced cleaning will also reduce the risk to others.

### **Will emergency repairs still take place?**

Yes –we will continue to provide an emergency repairs service, if there is a situation that presents a serious risk to health and safety, such as no hot or cold water, or an electrical failure. Where possible we will also continue to service the Warden Call system, fire alarms, emergency lighting systems, lift and gas safety inspections. All non-emergency repairs have been postponed.

### **If my Retirement Housing Advisor has to self-isolate, or goes off sick, who will support us?**

All the team are now working offsite and are based at home. We have a large team some of whom are required to self-isolate due to personal circumstances. However, we do have a pool of staff that are able to attend schemes to complete health and safety compliance testing, check calls and deliver notices whilst the remainder of the team are working from home. All non-essential visits have been cancelled and staff will continue to support you remotely.

### **Guest room bookings**

All guest room bookings have been suspended and the guest rooms are out of use.

## **Look after your mental wellbeing**

Understandably, you may find that social distancing can be boring or frustrating. You may find your mood and feelings are affected and you may feel low, worried or have problems sleeping and you might miss being outside with other people.

It can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behavior which can make you feel worse. There are simple things you can do that may help, to stay mentally and physically active during this time:

- look for ideas of exercises you can do at home on the NHS website
- spend time doing things you enjoy – this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to the radio or watching TV
- try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, continue to take prescribed medication according to instructions and try to avoid smoking and alcohol
- keep your windows open to let in fresh air, get some natural sunlight if you can, or get outside into the garden

You can go for a walk or exercise outdoors once a day if you stay more than 2 meters from others.

## **Stay connected with family and friends**

Draw on support you might have through your friends, family and other networks during this time. Try to stay in touch with those around you over the phone, by post, or online. Let people know how you would like to stay in touch and build that into your routine. This is also important in looking after your mental wellbeing and you may find it helpful to talk to them about how you are feeling.

It is OK to share your concerns with others you trust and in doing so you may end up providing support to them too.