

Factsheet

Private renting: Moving home during the COVID-19 outbreak

HOMES FIRST

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This leaflet summarises the latest government advice on moving home during the COVID-19 outbreak for those who rent in the private housing sector.

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Letting agents and private landlords

Tenants' safety should be letting agents' and landlords' first priority. The government has put in place protections for tenants during the coronavirus outbreak, including legislation to delay when landlords are able to start proceedings to evict tenants. This means until 30 September 2020, most landlords will not be able to start possession proceedings unless they have given their tenants three months' notice.

While measures to protect tenants during the coronavirus outbreak remain in place, letting agents and landlords should endeavour to avoid ending tenancies where the tenant wants and is able to stay.

Letting agents and landlords should be aware of and follow government [guidance on coronavirus and renting](#), which explains these protections in greater detail, and make sure tenants are aware of this guidance.

Private landlords and letting agents should not conduct viewings in properties where tenants are symptomatic or self-isolating, or where it has been determined that they are clinically extremely vulnerable and are shielding.

Any visits to a property must be made in accordance with government's [guidelines on working in other people's homes](#) and [social distancing](#).

If possible, necessary repairs, and gas and electrical safety checks should be conducted in the period between a property being vacated and a new tenant moving in. If this is not possible and visits are needed to an occupied property, this should be done by appointment with measures put in place to ensure physical contact is minimised, for example with residents staying in another room during the visit.

Landlords should make every effort to abide by gas and electrical safety requirements, which continue to be of great importance for tenants' safety. This may be more difficult due to restrictions associated with the coronavirus outbreak, for example where a tenant has coronavirus symptoms, is self-isolating or shielding. Under such circumstances, provided the landlord can demonstrate they have taken reasonable steps to comply, they would not be in breach. See further Health and Safety Executive [guidance on how to deal with specific circumstances](#). Letting agents may also want to consider obtaining landlord and tenant consent for inventory clerk appointments to occur before a tenant moves in, or after a tenant moves out during vacant periods if possible.

Letting agents and landlords should take steps to ensure any properties are prepared ready for new tenants, this may include cleaning to minimise any potential spread of the virus in line with [government advice](#).

Letting agents and landlords should refer to the [temporary COVID-19 measures that adjust right to rent checks](#), temporarily allowing these checks to be conducted

remotely. Lettings agents and landlords should consider other areas where in person payments, referencing or checks can be conducted remotely instead and take further advice if required.

Government advice on home moving

The government has amended the coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations. As a result of this, people who wish to move home can now do so. This guidance provides important public health information to ensure that moving home and key activities around this, such as viewing property, can happen safely.

One of the simplest steps you can take when moving home is to wash your hands frequently, and wherever possible stay at least 2 metres apart from people who are not members of your household.

Those involved in the process of finding and moving into a new home will have to adapt to ensure that the risk of spread of COVID-19 is reduced as far as possible. This will include doing more of the process online, such as virtual initial viewings; vacating your current property whilst other people are shown around; and ensuring your property is thoroughly cleaned before someone else moves in.

All parties involved are encouraged to be as flexible as possible over this period and to be prepared to delay moves, for example if someone becomes ill with coronavirus during the moving process or has to self-isolate.

You should consider whether you need to make provisions in contracts to manage these risks. You should not expect to move into any home where people have coronavirus or are self-isolating.

Vulnerable people or those shielding

People who are shielding or otherwise vulnerable may have pressing needs to move home. However, this should be balanced with the increased risks presented by coronavirus.

Those who are shielding or otherwise clinically vulnerable should ensure they are aware of the medical advice, including on staying at home and avoiding unnecessary contacts over this period, if at all possible.

Clinically vulnerable and shielded individuals (i.e. those who have received a letter advising they are in the clinically extremely vulnerable group) will need to carefully consider their personal situation and the circumstances of their own move, and may wish to seek medical advice before deciding whether to commit to or go ahead with a move. Some moves are likely to be lower risk - for instance if the home is empty, all travel can take place in their own transport and they can avoid contact with others.

Everyone in these categories who intends to move should make clear their status to all of the professionals involved in the process. They may be able to implement additional precautionary measures to further protect you.

Self-isolating or having tested positive for coronavirus

Moving home is not appropriate whilst you pose a direct risk of transmitting coronavirus. People who have coronavirus or are self-isolating with their family members should not leave their home to either move home, or undertake property viewings.

If you are contractually committed to move home, you should delay your move until all members of your household have come to the end of their self-isolation period.

Should a move be essential for people in this category, for instance due to an urgent health and safety risk, please contact Public Health England/local public health teams for advice.

Public Health England South East can be contacted on Tel: 0344 225 3861.

If a move is scheduled whilst measures to fight coronavirus apply

People are free to move home, however the process of finding and moving into a new home is likely to be different, as those involved in the process will need to adapt practices and procedures to ensure that the risk of spread of coronavirus is reduced as far as possible.

Initial viewings should be done virtually wherever this is possible and property agents should help you to do this.

All physical viewings should be limited to members of the same household and open house viewings should not take place.

When physically viewing properties, where possible, you should avoid touching surfaces, wash your hands regularly, and bring your own hand sanitiser. The number of people on a viewing should be minimised to those from your household that absolutely have to be there. If you need to be accompanied by small children, you should try to keep them from touching surfaces and ensure they wash their hands regularly.

If people are being shown around your current home, you should open all internal doors and ensure surfaces, such as door handles, are [cleaned](#) after each viewing with standard household cleaning products.

If your home is being viewed, it is recommended that you vacate your property whilst viewings are taking place in order to minimise your contact with those not in your household.

Anyone involved in any aspect of the home moving process should practice social distancing in line with public health advice.

When moving between properties, you and those in your household should try to do as much of the packing yourself as you can. Where this is not possible, you should speak to removal firms in advance. There is further advice about this below.

If you are particularly worried about the risk of infection, then speak to the professionals involved, your landlord, estate agent or removers as they may be able to put in place extra measures.

Everyone involved in the moving process must follow [social distancing](#) to minimise the spread of the virus.

Preparing to move home

You can start to look for properties you want to move into. If any member of the household being viewed is showing symptoms or is self-isolating then you should not physically visit the property.

To help prevent the spread of infection, we encourage people to do the majority of their property searching online; for example only physically viewing those properties which you believe you are most likely to want to move into.

Viewings

People should use virtual viewings before visiting properties in person where possible, in order to minimise public health risks. If any member of either the household being viewed, or the household undertaking a viewing is showing symptoms of coronavirus or is self-isolating, then a physical viewing should be delayed. All viewings should take place by appointment and only involve members of a single household.

We encourage people to do their property searching online wherever possible.

To support this, agents may ask home occupiers to conduct virtual viewings. This will help reduce the number of properties people need to visit before finding their future home.

If agents are expected to accompany clients on a viewing but follow social distancing rules wherever possible. Where viewings are unaccompanied, agents should make sure viewers and homeowners understand how they should conduct themselves.

Agreeing to move

Once you have agreed to move home by exchanging contracts or signing a tenancy agreement, you have entered into a legal agreement to move. We encourage all parties to be as flexible as possible over this period and be prepared to delay moves if needed, for example if someone becomes ill with coronavirus during the moving process or has to self-isolate. You should not expect to move into any home where people are ill or self-isolating.

If you require independent legal advice regarding any agreement you have entered into, you can get advice of this kind from Brighton Housing Trust (BHT). To contact them, call:

BHT Brighton Advice: 01273 234737; or

BHT Eastbourne Advice: 01323 642615.

If you are buying a property, your legal adviser should be able to help you to ensure that any contract you enter into has sufficient flexibility in the event that an individual in one of the parties contracts coronavirus or has to self-isolate.

Moving your belongings

Removal firms are able to operate, although they may need to adjust usual procedures in order to ensure moves happen as safely as possible.

We encourage you to contact removal firms as early as possible in advance of your move.

You and your household should also try and do as much of the packing yourself as possible. However, where this is not possible, you should speak to your removal firms in advance.

Where possible, you should [clean](#) your belongings, with standard domestic cleaning products before they are handled by others, including removal firms.

Whilst the removers are in your home, you should ensure any internal doors are open and seek to minimise your contact with the crew, maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres where possible.

All parties should wash their hands and avoid touching surfaces where possible to reduce the risk of transmitting the coronavirus.

You should not provide refreshments but you should ensure they have access to hand washing facilities, using separate towels or paper towels if possible, which should be washed or disposed of safely afterwards.

Estate Agents

Estate agents should inform customers and their own staff about their procedures, so that they are safe throughout the sales process.

Agents should ask whether any party is showing symptoms or has been asked to self-isolate before going ahead with any viewing, or visits to offices.

Agents should operate using an appointment system for visits to their offices and when conducting viewings.

Agents should not carry out any open house viewings.

Agents should strongly encourage clients to view properties virtually in the first instance and then only physically inspect properties which they have a strong interest in.

Agents can accompany physical viewings and seek to maintain a minimum of 2 metres distance from others wherever possible. Where social distancing is not possible and the visit is within an enclosed space, agents should consider wearing a face covering in line with [government guidance](#).

Agents should not drive clients to appointments.

All parties viewing a property should wash their hands with soap and water (or hand sanitiser if not available) immediately after entering the properties, with internal doors opened and surfaces having been wiped down before they enter. Separate towels or paper towels should be used if possible and washed or disposed of safely after use.

Agents should do what they can to promote flexibility when arranging move dates, for example advising clients to ensure contracts have explicit terms to manage the timing risks presented by coronavirus.

Agents should work with their clients and other agents to broker a new date to move where sales are due to complete and one of the parties falls ill with coronavirus or has to self-isolate.

Agents should ensure that any keys are appropriately [cleaned](#) before handover.

Removals firms

Removal firms are able to operate and should follow the latest government guidance on [safer working](#). Where moves are carried out, [social distancing](#) should be followed. Companies should ensure employees understand how to operate safely and communicate this to customers.

Removers should contact the household in advance to check that no member of the household is showing symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating. If they are, works should be delayed.

No work should be carried out by a person who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild.

Removers should seek to minimise contact with homeowners and remain 2 metres apart from householders at all times.

Removers should implement a buddy system and ensure that the same people work together when moving bulky items and furniture.

Removers should bring their own refreshments but you should ensure they have access to hand washing facilities, using separate towels or paper towels if possible, which should be washed or disposed of safely afterwards.