

Government advice on home moving during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

This guidance applies to people moving between private residential homes.

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Contents

1. [Advice to the public](#)
2. [Advice to industry](#)
3. [Social landlords](#)

The government has amended the coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations to make clear that people who wish to move home can 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.

It is important that everyone knows how to [stay alert, contain the virus and save lives](#). Our success containing the virus so far has been hard fought and hard won. We must proceed with the utmost care in the next phase, and avoid undoing what we have achieved. 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.

This document does not represent a return to normality. The process of finding and moving into a new home will need to be different given those involved in the process will have to adapt practices and procedures to ensure that the risk of spread of coronavirus 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.

We encourage all parties involved to be as flexible as possible over this period and be prepared to delay moves, for example if someone becomes ill with coronavirus during the moving process or has to self-isolate. It may also become necessary to pause all home moves for a short period of time to manage the spread of the coronavirus. We will let you know if this has to happen.

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.

1. Advice to the public

More detail on progressing the individual elements of the home buying and selling or rental process and how this applies to different groups is set out in the next section.

Vulnerable people or those shielding

We recognise people who are shielding or otherwise vulnerable may also have pressing needs to move home; however, this should be balanced with the increased risks presented by coronavirus.

In line with government's advice, 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. All parties involved in home buying and selling should prioritise agreeing amicable arrangements to change move dates for individuals in this group, or where someone in a chain is in this group.

Clinically vulnerable and shielded individuals (ie 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.

We would encourage everyone in these categories who does intend to move, to 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.

People 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 member 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. All parties involved in home buying and selling should prioritise agreeing amicable arrangements to change move dates for individuals, or where someone in a chain or their family member is self-isolating or has tested positive for coronavirus.

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.

What does this mean for my property move or purchase which 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. It is vital that everyone [stays alert and safe](#).

- 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.
- As most people choose to, we recommend 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.

A. Preparing to buy, sell or move home

You can put your home on the market and 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 estate agents should not physically visit the property.

- You can begin to market your home and estate agents are able to visit in order to take photos/videos of 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.
- As usual, you can also start to bring together the documentation necessary to sell your property (more information on these documents is available in the government's [guidance on how to sell homes](#)).
- If you wish to buy a new build property you should make contact with the developer in the usual way. You should be able to view the show home or visit the particular plot you are interested in purchasing, although there will be appointment systems in place.

B. 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. Initial viewings should be done virtually wherever this is possible and physical viewings should only be conducted where buyers are seriously considering making an offer on a property.
- 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.
- Viewings should be conducted by appointment only and no open house viewings should take place.
- If your property is being viewed, you should open all the internal doors prior to the viewing, and allow access to handwashing facilities and ideally separate towels/paper towels.
- As most people choose to do, we encourage that you vacate your property whilst viewings are taking place in order to minimise your contact with those not in your household.
- When viewing a property, all parties should wash their hands and avoid touching surfaces where possible. Agents will ask you to restrict the number of people who accompany you on a viewing so that social distancing can be practised, and only those in your immediate household should be there.
- We expect agents 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.
- Once the viewing has taken place, the homeowner should ensure surfaces, such as door handles, are [cleaned](#) with standard household cleaning products and towels disposed of safely or washed as appropriate.

C. Making offers or reservations

You are free to make or accept an offer or reserve a property as normal.

- There is a greater risk that parties may need to delay their move because someone is showing symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating. Where needed your legal adviser should advise you and help make sure that any contracts or agreements are as flexible as possible to accommodate this risk.
- Prospective purchasers may wish to visit a property again once they have agreed a sale, for example to measure up. Where this has been agreed to, the above advice on prioritising virtual visits, hygiene measures, maintaining social distancing at all times and mitigating contact where possible should be followed.
- Purchasers may also want to send in tradespeople to carry out inspections. Where possible these should be scheduled with one person visiting the property at any time. No tradespeople should enter a property where a member of the household is showing symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating. Where a tradesperson is visiting the property, the occupier should maintain social distancing, wash their hands regularly and minimise contact as far as possible, for example by staying in another room. These visits should be carried out in line with government [safer working guidance](#).

D. Property searches and surveys

Your legal representative should be able to carry out searches on your property online in order to progress your transaction and you can contact them to discuss likely timescales.

Your surveyor can undertake surveys of the property you wish to purchase.

- Surveyors should not enter a property where a member of the household is showing symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating.
- Where possible we encourage inspections to take place by appointment only, with one person visiting the property at any time. Surveyors should follow government [guidance for professionals working in other people's homes](#) and guidance on [social distancing](#).
- If your home is being surveyed, you should ensure the surveyor has access to all the parts of the property they need to inspect, and make efforts to minimise contact with the surveyor, for example by staying in another room whilst they are inspecting your home.

E. 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.

- Your legal adviser should be able to help you to ensure that any contract you enter into has sufficient flexibility to allow the purchase to be delayed in the event that an individual in one of the parties contracts coronavirus or has to self-isolate.
- We encourage you to be as flexible as possible if you are asked to delay your move, and in turn, you can speak to your legal advisor about this.

F. 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.
- We ask that, where possible, you [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.

2. Advice to industry

All businesses should follow the government's latest [guidance for employers and businesses](#) on coronavirus and [safer working guidance](#).

As well as government guidance, we encourage all professionals to speak to their representative bodies and familiarise themselves with the guidance that these bodies have prepared for their specific sectors.

It is important that all businesses work together to ensure we [stay alert and safe](#) to minimise the spread of infection and we expect all sectors to consider how they can operate in a way which minimises the need for face to face contact.

A. Estate agents

Estate agents can open for business but should consider how and when to reopen their premises given government guidance on [safer working](#). 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, they should consider wearing a face covering in line with [government guidance](#).
- Where they do not accompany the visit, they should make sure that both buyers and sellers clearly understand how the viewing should be conducted safely.
- 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.

B. Developers and new build sales

Developers can continue with sales during this period but should ensure that their sales teams follow the government's [safer working guidance](#). Developers should inform consumers and their own staff about their procedures, so that they are safe throughout the sales process.

- Where possible, developers should promote virtual viewings.
- Where physical viewings do take place, including visits to show homes, these should be by appointment with one household visiting one property at a time.
- Developers should [clean](#) surfaces between viewings.
- For new reservations and contracts, developers should work with conveyancers to ensure contracts take account of the risks posed by coronavirus, including

building in flexibility in case move dates need to change as a result of someone falling ill with coronavirus or needing to self-isolate.

- Developers should do what they can to support anyone with coronavirus symptoms or self-isolating, and those they are in chain with, to agree a new date.

C. Tradespeople

Moving home is often a time when people want to undertake work to improve their new home or prepare their old home for sale. This work can involve fitting new kitchens, redecorating, and other home improvement work. This work is also important when people aren't moving home. It is a key way for households and landlords to improve the home environment and address poor quality accommodation while also providing important work for tradespeople who's businesses have been affected by the virus.

Tradespeople should follow the follow the government's safer working guidance. Companies should ensure employees understand how to operate safely and communicate this to customers.

- Tradespeople 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.
- Tradespeople should wash their hands on entering the property using separate towels of paper towels which need to be washed or disposed of safely after use.
- Tradespeople should seek to minimise contact with homeowners and remain 2 metres apart from householders at all times.
- Tradespeople should implement a buddy system and ensure that the same people work together where this is needed.
- Tradespeople 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.

D. Conveyancers

Conveyancers can open for business and can take on new instructions. They should make sure their clients are aware of the differences in completing transactions during this period.

- Conveyancers should aim to conduct as much of their business remotely as possible.
- Where client meetings need to take place, measures should be put in place to ensure appropriate social distancing and hygiene measures.
- Conveyancers should do what they can to promote flexibility making provisions for the risks presented by coronavirus, for example when advising their clients

who are ready to move not to exchange contracts on an occupied property unless they have made explicit provision for the risks presented by the virus.

- Conveyancers should prioritise support for anyone who is clinically vulnerable or shielding, or with symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating to agree a new date to move.

E. New Build Home Warranty Assessments and claims against the warranty

Inspectors can carry out warranty assessments on new build properties. Inspectors should follow public health guidance on [social distancing](#) and guidance for [working in other people's homes](#). Companies should ensure employees understand how to operate safely and communicate this to customers.

- New build warranty providers can continue to provide a normal service to homebuilders and consumers, including site visits and inspections.
- No work should be carried out by a person who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild or anyone who has been asked to self-isolate.
- Inspectors 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.
- Where residents are making a claim against their new build warranty, in the first instance they should speak with the warranty provider. Where possible the warranty providers should investigate claims remotely using video or photo evidence. If this is not possible and an inspector needs to visit an occupied property, this should be done by appointment and measures put in place to ensure physical contact is minimised, for example with residents staying in another room during the visit.

F. Surveyors and EPC assessors

Surveyors and EPC assessors are free to visit properties to carry out surveys. Surveyors should follow the latest government guidance for [working in other people's homes](#). Where surveys are carried out, all public health guidance on [social distancing](#) must be followed. Companies should ensure employees understand how to operate safely and communicate this to customers.

- Surveyors should contact the owners of the property to be surveyed prior to the survey to make sure they understand which areas will be surveyed and ensure that all doors and access panels are open and surfaces have been [cleaned](#) with household cleaning products in line with public health advice. During a visit, members of the household should follow social distancing guidance, staying 2 metres away wherever possible, for example by staying in another room.
- No work should be carried out by a person who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild or anyone who has been asked to self-isolate.
- Surveyors should wash their hands immediately upon entering the property, using separate towels or paper towels which need to be washed or disposed of safely after use.

- Surveyors should be clear in any reports about areas which they weren't able to inspect due to public health limitations.

G. 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.
- They should also encourage households to ensure all internal doors are open and surfaces and possessions have been [cleaned](#) with household cleaning products prior to them entering the property.
- No work should be carried out by a person who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild.
- Removers should wash their hands on entering the property using separate towels of paper towels which need to be washed or disposed of safely after use.
- 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.

H. 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.

This guidance for landlords and letting agents is to help them safely let empty properties, or properties which tenants are voluntarily vacating. While broader 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.
- In other cases, where viewings can proceed, they should be conducted in line with the guidance on viewings earlier in this document.
- 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, 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 also 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 consider how best to conduct tenancy check-ins for new tenancies agreed while broader measures remain in place, taking care to follow government advice on [social distancing](#) to minimise possible spread of coronavirus.
- Letting agents and landlords are reminded of 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.

3. Social landlords

Allocation by local housing authorities is governed by [Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996](#) and authorities must have regard to statutory guidance. Registered providers of social housing should refer to the [relevant regulatory standards](#) set out by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Landlords will need to consider how to carry out their activities in line with the government's advice on [social distancing in the workplace](#)). Practices should also be altered in line with this wider guidance, including:

- property inspections for vacating tenants
- collecting returned keys
- conducting viewings
- conducting tenancy sign-ups
- preparing homes to be re-let

Some applicants and tenants may be anxious about moving at this time. It will be important to ensure that they are not put under undue pressure to move, if they are not ready or able to do so.

It will also be important to discuss with applicants and tenants their state of health, level of vulnerability and their arrangements for moving (including any assistance required) before proceeding with the move.

Landlords should avoid moving tenants who are showing symptoms of coronavirus or self-isolating. There may be exceptions to this (e.g. safety reasons) and in these scenarios landlords should speak to the local Public Health team about appropriate infection control measures before taking any action.

Landlords should also avoid moving residents who are shielding because they have been notified they are in the clinically extremely vulnerable group. If a home move is required, the landlord should speak to the local Public Health team for advice on appropriate measures to protect the resident.

Right to Buy

The Right to Buy is governed by [Part 5 of the Housing Act 1985](#) which sets out the right of eligible social tenants to purchase the home they currently rent and occupy; and the timescales for doing this.

Tenants have the right to purchase their home within the provisions of the legislation. The government recognises that the measures put in place to combat coronavirus are likely to make it difficult for councils to process Right to Buy applications within the statutory timescales.

Landlords will want to consider how best they can manage the application process to ensure tenants are able to take up their Right to Buy within a reasonable timescale, while acting in accordance with government guidelines on [social distancing](#).

This could include options around:

- valuations of properties
- fraud prevention measures
- the issuing of documentation
- using the discretion provided to them within the legislation

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