

COVID-19 Guidance for Building Managers and Residents of Multi Unit Residential Dwellings

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection caused by new type of Coronavirus. COVID-19 presents as a wide range of illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe respiratory illnesses. The most common symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing
- muscle aches
- fatigue
- headache
- sore throat
- runny nose¹

How does COVID-19 spread?

Current science indicates that COVID-19 is spread through direct contact and respiratory droplets. This means that people spread the virus by being close together or touching contaminated surfaces and then touching their faces.¹

Building manager responsibilities

Building managers (e.g. strata or condominium corporations, landlords, and other property managers) are legally and ethically obligated to implement measures to decrease the risk of disease transmission among residents and employees.² Building managers must maintain rental properties and adhere to minimum property standards.² These standards are laid out in municipal by-laws, or in absence of municipal by-laws, in accordance with the Landlord Tenancy Act, which requires landlords to maintain sanitation and safety of common areas.²

What should a building manager do to keep staff and residents safe?

- **Develop policies and communicate with staff to ensure employees are protected and do not come to work while sick.** Make employees aware of the symptoms of COVID and ensure that employees who show any of the signs and symptoms stay home or are sent home immediately. Encourage staff to wash their hands often with soap and water or to use alcohol-based hand rub, to avoid touching their face, and to maintain physical distancing.^{1,2}

- **Frequently clean and disinfect common areas.** Adequately and frequently clean high-touch surfaces in common areas (e.g. enterphones, elevator panels and buttons, light switches, indoor and outdoor hand railings, mailboxes, door knobs and handles, recycling and garbage chute handles, laundry machines, etc.).² Consult [Health Canada's website](#) for a list of hard-surface disinfectants that may be used against the virus that causes COVID-19. Consult Public Health Ontario's [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#) or the National Collaborating Centre on Environmental Health's [COVID-19 Precautions for Multi-unit Residential Buildings](#) for more in-depth information on cleaning and disinfection.
- **Support hand hygiene** by placing alcohol-based hand sanitizer at building entrances and in common spaces that remain open (e.g. mail and laundry rooms) and ensuring they are frequently refilled.
- **Take steps to encourage [physical distancing](#).** Ensure that residents and staff can keep a safe distance of 2 metres (6 feet) apart from each other. Building management does not have the power to confine residents to their units, however, managers can close non-essential amenities (e.g. gyms, common rooms, recreation rooms, pools, etc.) to prevent gatherings and reduce the spread of the virus. Necessary facilities (e.g. elevators, shared laundry facilities, and in some cases, common washrooms) cannot be closed. Conduct building governance meetings and sales/rental viewings virtually to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Encourage residents to use alternate means to check-in with friends, neighbours, and family.²
- **Avoid non-essential visits to tenant units.** Landlords should request entry to a tenant's unit only in urgent situations and follow physical distancing guidelines. If tenants have been instructed by Public Health authorities to self-isolate, staff should postpone visits to the unit for service until after the self-isolation period of 14 days, if possible. Landlords are subject to the Human Rights Code and have a duty to accommodate tenants under protected grounds, including people with disabilities. For example, conducting an in-person showing when a tenant has an immune-compromising condition could lead to a complaint under the Code.^{3,4}
- **Ensure functioning building ventilation systems.** Ventilation systems should supply the required ventilation rates, maintain corridor pressurization (if applicable) to prevent air from infected units flowing into corridors, and have clean and functioning filters. Building managers may need to consult with an HVAC professional to determine what, if any, modifications are necessary to building ventilation systems.²
- **Work with residents around rent and eviction issues.** Tenants may have been impacted by business closures or layoffs. Work together with residents to

Follow these recommendations for necessary facilities that cannot be closed:

Elevators: Assess elevators for size and post a sign at each entrance that outlines the number of people that can fit inside the elevator with a radius of 2m around them.

Laundry: Post [this poster](#) near laundry facilities to promote best practices for infection control.

Common washrooms: Enhance cleaning with appropriate disinfectants, keep washrooms well stocked with soap and paper towel, and advise users to flush the toilet with the lid down, where possible.²

establish fair arrangements to keep tenants in their homes. Note that, Under the Residential Tenancies Act, landlords cannot charge fees or penalties for late rent payments. Landlords can give eviction notices, however, enforcement of residential eviction orders is [suspended until further notice](#).³

- **Protect the privacy of residents with COVID-19.** Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) manages the care and assessment of infected individuals and we will inform building managers of cases only if additional measures are needed. Building managers must protect the privacy of individuals who become ill with COVID-19.²
- **Share information from health officials with residents through available channels** (e.g. posters, notices, emails, newsletters and social media).² Make use of the posters, information, and images available in the Resources for Building Managers document or on [WDGPH's website](#).

Where can a building manager find help?

- A number of sources are available to assist building managers with COVID-19 related questions.
 - o [Public Health](#) can assist you with questions related to COVID-19 infection prevention and control. Call us at 1-800-265-7293 or 519-822-2715.
 - o Municipalities may be able to help with property taxes and municipal service fees³
 - o Mortgage lenders may be able to offer mortgage payment deferrals³
 - o [Federal government programs](#) may be available to support building managers³
 - o The Landlord and Tenant Board is still accepting some applications. For more information, visit [their website](#)

Resident Rights and Responsibilities

What are my rights and responsibilities as a resident during COVID-19?

The Government of Ontario has created helpful webpages about [Tenant Rights in Ontario](#) and [Changes to Renting During COVID-19](#). This document provides guidance on issues that may arise specific to COVID-19.

- **You have a right to clean, maintained common areas.** Building managers are required to maintain the minimum requirements for maintenance of rental properties, as well as meet property standards as set by municipal by-laws or otherwise stated in the Residential Tenancy Act, 2006.⁵ If you have a problem with building maintenance, you should first ask the landlord in writing to fix the problem. If after notification, the landlord does not fix the maintenance issue within a reasonable time, you may reach out to your municipality and/or file a

complaint with the Landlord Tenant Board. For more detailed steps, please refer to the [Tribunal's brochure on Residential Maintenance](#).

- **Residents who can pay their rent must do so to the best of their abilities.** It is understandable that residents who are asked to self-isolate or who can't work may have difficulty paying their rent. Tenants who are having challenges paying rent should speak with their landlords about possibly deferring their rent or making other payment arrangements. The [Government of Ontario](#) encourages landlords and tenants to work together during this difficult time to establish fair arrangements to keep tenants in their homes. Note that, under the Residential Tenancies Act, landlords cannot charge fees or penalties for late rent payments.³
- **Evictions have been suspended until further notice, except under certain circumstances.** During the COVID-19 State of Emergency, eviction applications and orders are suspended, except for urgent issues (e.g. an illegal act of serious impairment of safety). Landlords can give eviction notices; however, landlords are encouraged to work with tenants to establish fair arrangements to keep tenants in their homes, including deferring rent or other payment arrangements. Residents are still expected to pay their rent to the best of their abilities and uphold the requirements of their tenancy if there is a pending eviction order or an order is not being enforced. It is illegal for a landlord to change the locks to a rental unit or the building, without giving the tenant a key for the new locks. If you are a tenant and a landlord has locked you out, or is threatening to lock you out, contact the [Rental Housing Enforcement Unit](#) (1-888-772-9277).³
- **Work with your landlord about access to your unit.** Building managers are being encouraged to request entry to units only in urgent situations and to follow [physical distancing guidelines](#). A landlord must provide the following before entering a tenant's unit: give the tenant 24 hours written notice, state what day and time they will enter (between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.), state the reason for entering the unit. There are some exceptions to this requirement, for example, in case of emergency. If the landlord has a valid reason for entering the unit, a resident cannot refuse the landlord access. Landlords are subject to the Human Rights Code and have a duty to accommodate tenants under protected grounds, including people with disabilities. For example, conducting an in-person showing when a resident has an immune-compromising condition could lead to a complaint under the Code.^{3,6}

What can I do to keep myself and my neighbours safe?

- **Practice good hygiene.** Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth unless you have just cleaned your hands. Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue or into your arm, not your hand.
- **Stay home and avoid close contact with people outside of your household.** This may involve avoiding non-essential common areas in your building (e.g.

common rooms, gyms, etc.). Your landlord may even close non-essential common areas to keep residents safe.

- **Maintain physical distancing.** Keep 2 metres (6 feet) apart from people in essential common spaces (e.g. laundry and mail rooms, waiting for an empty elevator, or using stairs). Avoid crowded elevators and wait for an empty one if you can.
- **Consider using a non-medical mask to cover your face in areas where physical distancing may be challenging or impossible.** Face coverings may help prevent you from spreading COVID in places where it is difficult to maintain physical distancing. However, they will not protect you from getting COVID. The best way to protect yourself is to: stay home except for essential reasons, avoid close contact with others and keep at least two meters from others outside your household, and to practice good hygiene. More information about face coverings, including how to properly use, clean and dispose of face coverings, is available on the Government of Ontario [website](#).⁷
- **Take action if you have COVID-19 symptoms.** Anyone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should [self-isolate](#) immediately and take the [Government of Ontario's online Self-Assessment](#).⁷ If you have COVID-19 symptoms, consider opening the windows in your unit to increase natural ventilation to lessen the risk of transmission to others in the unit.²

Where can residents find help?

- [Public Health](#) can assist you with questions about COVID-19 symptoms and how to keep your family safe. Call us at 1-800-265-7293 or 519-822-2715.
- Local service managers are available to help you find housing options in your area. Find out more [here](#).
- [Legal Aid Ontario](#) provides legal assistance to Ontarians with low incomes. They can be reached at 1-800-668-8258.
- Financial assistance may be available through the [Province of Ontario](#) or the [Federal Government](#).
- The Landlord and Tenant Board is still accepting some applications. For more information, visit [their website](#).

References

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3. Government of Ontario. Renting: changes during COVID-19 [Internet].2020. [cited 20 Apr 2020] Available from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/renting-changes-during-covid-19#section-2>
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