



All HMO licence holders

July 2020

My reference: COVID19PRS

Please ask for: Environmental Health Line

Dear Sir/Madam,

Coronavirus and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

As an HMO Licence Holder or managing agent, this letter is being sent to you from the Council's Private Sector Housing Health Team to help you maintain a safe environment in your properties during this coronavirus pandemic. We recognise that this is a challenging time for those who manage shared properties and hope that this letter will guide you towards information that will help you navigate the pandemic safely.

Where the NHS or RBKC becomes aware of an outbreak of coronavirus in a premises that you manage, you are likely to be contacted again to discuss the details on how you will minimise the impact of that outbreak. It is advisable that you start thinking about this scenario and risks involved and we hope this letter will assist you.

Maintaining Cleanliness & Hygiene

The shared areas in HMOs and blocks of flats pose a high risk if there is an outbreak because surfaces that are frequently touched could be a source of the spread of coronavirus. The responsibility of maintaining cleanliness in HMOs common parts and shared facilities lies with the landlord, under the HMO management regulations. You may wish to,

- ✓ Provide hand gel in the common parts for your residents.
- ✓ Advise residents to clean and disinfect shared facilities (kitchens and bathrooms) before and after use.
- ✓ Advise tenants to stagger meal preparation times, if possible, so that only one person is using the kitchen at any one time.
- ✓ Arrange for cleaners to attend to the common parts on a greater frequency than usual, paying special attention to high contact touch points like light-switches, cooker controls, taps, door handles, toilet seats, flush levers, flush pull chains and ensure that cleaners are using suitable protective equipment;
- ✓ Consider disconnecting any re-circulating air conditioners which share air between dwellings; and ensure your risk assessment is up to date,
- ✓ Put up posters to remind users of the shared facilities about keeping surfaces sanitised;

- ✓ Run taps and showers in unoccupied accommodation for at least 10 minutes upon new occupation to reduce the risk of Legionella;
- ✓ If you are aware of any resident who has symptoms of coronavirus, is isolating, is diagnosed with coronavirus, or needs essential food, medicines or assistance the Council can help. Please contact RBKC's COVID-19 HUB on 0207 361 4326 or email C19Hub@rbkc.gov.uk.

Letting Units Safely

You may be advertising vacant units in the HMOs you manage, and you should stay alert to the potential for COVID spread in those properties. You should:

- ✓ Make sure that the hot water supply is fully functioning and that windows can be opened and securely closed;
- ✓ Make sure that the unit of accommodation, the shared areas and the furniture and furnishings provided are in a good, clean condition;
- ✓ Confirm with the current occupiers whether they are isolating or shielding before arranging visits, postponing visits where any current resident is shielding or isolating until suitable arrangements can be made for the viewing to be completed safely;
- ✓ Conduct virtual viewings first, only undertaking physical viewings once necessary;
- ✓ Don't carry out open house viewings;
- ✓ Take your own towels/paper towels/ hand gel and wash your hands thoroughly when attending the property; dispose of used tissue and masks using double bags; and ensure that those visiting to view do the same;
- ✓ Wear a face covering; and ensure prospective tenants who view use them too;
- ✓ Sanitise keys before and after handing to contractors or tenants.

Further Government guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/government-advice-on-home-moving-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

Undertaking Repairs:

You remain responsible for ensuring properties are kept in repair and urgent essential health and safety repairs should still be made, if safe to do for the occupants, landlord and contractor. The advice for workers/contractors is to distance 'where possible' to prevent the transmission of the virus. Please see guidance 'Working in other people's homes'

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes>

Evictions:

The government extended the suspension of new evictions until 23 August. Emergency legislation has been introduced so landlords won't be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a 3-month period, which will remain in place until at least September. Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities>

Rent and Mortgage Difficulties:

If you have a mortgage on your rented property and are struggling as a direct result of coronavirus, you may be entitled to apply for a mortgage holiday up to 3 months until the 31st October 2020. You should contact your mortgage provider directly. It is expected that any landlord taking up this option should pass this advantage on to tenants by deferring their rent.

The Housing and Health Team can be contacted via Environmental Health Line 0207 361 3002 or via email to environmentalhealth@rbkc.gov.uk

Yours faithfully

Stephen Brown
Interim Director for Public Protection

For local coronavirus information go to the RBKC website:

www.rbkc.gov.uk/coronavirus

For advice for Landlords and Tenants

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities>

For the most recent Government advice on 'Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)'

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

For access to NHS 111 online for information on what to do if you feel unwell:

<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

For the latest information from the NHS:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

HSEs guide to Legionella <https://www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires/legionella-landlords-responsibilities.htm>

HSEs guide to Air Conditioning & Ventilation During Coronavirus Outbreak

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation.htm>