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THE BUYING AND SELLING PROCESS – COVID 19

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.

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- 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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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 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](#).

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

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 (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.

- 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.