



CORONAVIRUS RENTER RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions:

What if I can't pay my rent on time? If you can't pay your rent because of job loss or income interruption resulting from the economic impact of COVID-19, it is imperative that you immediately communicate with your landlord. For most residents, rent is due on or before the 1st day of the month. It would be beneficial if you can communicate with your landlord prior to the time rent is due. A number of landlords are working with their residents to accommodate residents' needs at this difficult time. Some landlords have waived fees, applied security deposits to the rent or temporarily abated rent. In order to qualify for any landlord workout program, be prepared to verify your job loss or income interruption. Additionally, be sure to have your arrangement in writing and signed by you and the landlord.

Can my landlord limit repairs to emergency situations only? Yes. For the safety and well-being of maintenance employees and residents, many landlords have limited repairs to emergency situations only. This should allow a landlord to address conditions that materially affect the physical health or safety of an ordinary tenant. Please cooperate with your landlord by respecting social distancing recommendations when maintenance personnel are in your unit. Either go into a separate room or be mindful of the CDC's guidelines for remaining six-feet away from others.

If I need help paying my rent, are there assistance programs available? Yes. Many community non-profits also offer emergency financial assistance for additional needs, including utility or medical bills. The list of organizations in the box at right MAY offer rental assistance.

Is my landlord authorized to close common area amenities during the pandemic period? Yes. During this crisis, many communities are following CDC's recommendations with respect to practicing social distancing and taking measures to limit the spread of the virus. As a result, many properties are closing common area amenities, requesting that you pay rent online, restricting the management office to employees only, and limiting repairs to only emergency situations.

If I need to move into a new apartment, can I do so in a county that has issued a "Stay Home" order? Most likely, yes. Most of the orders contain language indicating that persons may leave their residences for "Essential Activities". Essential Activities typically include engaging in activities or performing tasks essential to a person's health and safety, or to the health and safety of a person's family or household members. Essential Activities also include obtaining necessary services. If you are relocating your place of residence because your current lease has terminated or if you have scheduled a move-in date during the period of a Stay Home order, you should be considered to be engaging in activities that are essential to your health and safety.

Should I carry a certificate stating that I am performing Essential Activities when moving into a new apartment? The orders handed down by the various counties in and around the Houston area have not indicated that a special certificate is required. However, carrying a certificate along with your identification may help law enforcement determine that you are performing an Essential Activity when relocating to your place of residence. If you want to obtain a certificate, you can ask the landlord of the community to which you are moving for assistance. They may have access to a certificate that will allow you to travel while you are moving into the community.

If my landlord is not responding to my maintenance request, can I fix things in my apartment myself? Most leases do not allow you to fix things yourself or alter the apartment in any way. Before you embark on a project, you should communicate with your landlord and get the landlord's permission. The landlord may be interested in knowing what you plan to do, what materials you would be using and what contractor, if any, you intend to retain.

Does my landlord have to notify me when someone tests positive in my community? Although many landlords may notify residents when someone has tested positive in the community, the landlord is not obligated to do so. The Harris County Health Department should work with the person's doctor and inform people with whom the infected person was in contact that they may be at risk. Please do not rely on your landlord to tell you someone has been infected before taking precautions recommended by the CDC and other health officials. Be sure to practice social distancing and keep six feet away from others. Follow all instructions from the CDC and health departments with respect to washing your hands and following other guidelines related to personal hygiene.

Can I be evicted even though there is a public health crisis? The Texas Supreme Court has halted most evictions, including for non-payment of rent, until April 19. Someone may still face eviction for posing an imminent threat of physical harm to others, or engaging in criminal activity. However, you can still be issued a notice to vacate by your Property Manager for non-payment of rent. This notice is an indication that the rental property owner intends to pursue an eviction if rent is not paid and will usually occur if you fail to respond to notices/requests to contact your Property Manager.

If I am unable to pay your utility bills during this time of crisis, what should I do? Several but not all Texas electricity providers have suspended disconnects and are waiving late fees during the COVID-19 crisis. Please check directly with your provider on what options they offer during this time. Remember that even if disconnection is suspended, your bills will continue to accrue.

Do I still need to pay rent even though evictions have been halted? Yes – the court's temporary halt of evictions does not affect your obligation to pay rent, and continuing to pay your rent protects your rights as a renter under Texas law. If you're concerned you will not be able to pay your rent, we recommend you communicate with your property manager with specific information about your situation to see what options they may be able to offer in this unusual circumstance. This crisis has affected all of us and apartment owners want to do their part in helping people remain in their homes. Like every other business, we have employees and supplier partners who depend on us for their livelihood, as well as other obligations we have to meet like insurance and utility bills. Failing to pay your rent hurts our ability to meet those obligations, as well as our ability to operate and maintain the property where you live. Ultimately it may also hurt your credit or result in an eviction once that process is reinstated.

What if I live at a public housing authority property, affordable housing property or use Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8)? Both public housing and Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) residents who experience a loss or reduction of wages should contact their housing authority to see what can be done to provide assistance.

What should I do if I have to self-isolate in my apartment? To avoid unnecessary contact, or maintenance staff entering your unit, consider notifying the management that you are undergoing self-isolation or quarantine. • Avoid close contact with other people and pets. • Maintain respiratory hygiene (use tissues, cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing). • Keep your apartment clean and organized to maintain a healthy environment. Clean regularly and sanitize often using items like Lysol spray and Clorox wipes on "high touch" surfaces including countertops, tabletops, doorknobs, nightstands, bathroom fixtures, toilets, refrigerator handles, kitchen faucets, light switches, TV remotes, cell phones, computer keyboards and tablets. • Do not leave your unit unless it's an emergency. Do not use common areas. • Postpone non-essential maintenance requests.

What if I have to move/apartment hunt during the pandemic? • Practice basic prevention—Take the usual precautionary measures, including not shaking hands, washing your hands after your visit is concluded, not touching your face and not touching surfaces, especially in common areas. Use hand sanitizer. • Consider virtual tours • Inquire about safety measures in place – Apartment communities are incorporating additional measures during this outbreak, such as deep-cleaning and disinfecting high-traffic surfaces. They may have closed or limited access to common rooms, gyms and laundry rooms. They may be stationing hand-sanitizer around the building. Finally, inquire how was the unit you plan to rent sanitized. • Vet your moving/van rental company – Before scheduling your move, inquire what sanitation procedures your moving company has in place. Ask for movers to wear gloves to avoid contaminating your belongings. Alternately, consider moving your belongings yourself to minimize exposure, but make sure to enquire about sanitation procedures your moving van rental company has in place.

What about access to amenities? During this crisis, rental communities are following CDC recommendations to practice social distancing and take measures to limit spread of the virus.

As a result, rental properties may: • Close select or all amenities • Ask you to pay rent online • Close office to non-employees • Limit repairs to emergency situations only

We realize that these actions may be inconvenient but are intended to help protect you, your neighbors and people who work at the property. Communal behaviors to limit the contamination spread: • Wash your hands often, avoid touching your face and practice respiratory hygiene. • Avoid close contact with people who are sick. • Clean and disinfect your apartment to maintain a healthy environment • Limit contamination of common amenities, such as the communal gym, movie room, or a playground, by using disinfecting wipes before and after you use the equipment. • Avoid using common areas and amenities if you are sick. • Limit visitors – Practice social distancing by limiting visitors to your unit or inviting friends/family to share common areas with you.