

OUR COVID-19 HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY



INTRODUCTION

As we return to our workplace, the most important fact is to ensure we continue to safeguard everyone who we work with, and for.

In order to minimise all possible risk of a second round of the virus and a further lockdown, we have made changes to our processes, our working environment and how our team operates.

The following sections outline how we have achieved this.

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PEOPLE

1

We will check on the health of the people working for us. We will have a one-to-one with each member of our team to establish they are 'healthy' to return to work and complete a 'health assessment' form with each of them.

As part of our morning meeting, we will carry out a daily check-in within our team to ensure no health conditions have changed.

OUR PREMISES

2

We will have prepared our office. When our team return, we will accommodate the two-metre social distancing rule, this may mean fewer 'desks' or work stations to allow this to happen. We will mark out the floor space to allow any customers or visitors to keep to the two-metre rule and we will limit the number of visitors to one party of two at any one time. We intend to keep face-to-face contact to a minimum and where possible, our staff will work side-by-side with a minimum two-metre distance between them, rather than facing each other.

If necessary, we will be installing screens on some desks to allow for customer interaction, while maintaining protection for all parties. This decision is made taking into consideration location, expected footfall and business operation model. We will designate desks to be used for talking to customers and ensure they are cleaned after each visit.

As our office will have been empty for several weeks it will require a good deep clean. We will arrange this before any staff return and cover all areas including the kitchen, staff room, toilet, fridge, microwave etc.

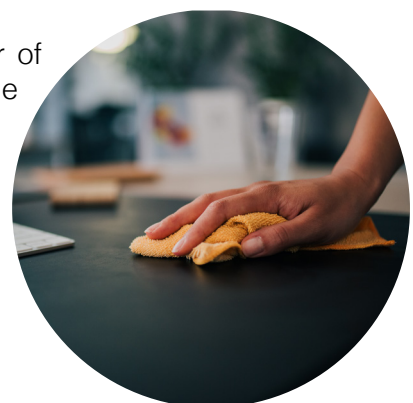
We have purchased an ample supply of hand-gel, anti-bacterial wipes and sprays, soap, tissues. We will always make sure that these are readily available on each desk for staff, visitors and customers to use.

We will have a regular cleaning routine throughout the day and notify all staff to vacate when we start the cleaning process. This will include: desks, chair arms, keyboards, mouse, screens, staplers, pens, photocopier controls, drawer handles, phones, mobile phones, key cabinets, filing cabinets, door handles and card machines where we take card payments.

We will also encourage staff to wash their hands with hot water and soap more frequently than before and make sure supplies are stocked up in washrooms, along with clean towels.

We may keep the front door locked so that we can control the number of visitors, this will provide extra assurance to both our team and anyone visiting.

Our business owners will lead by example and keep social distancing measures in place all the time. This includes when conducting morning meetings, when preparing refreshments, visits to the lavatories and allocating lunch breaks, all of which will be staggered.



Estate Agency is a 'people' business and requires interaction with sellers, buyers, applicants, landlords, tenants, and contractors to name but a few. How can we provide a safe environment for all concerned?

We will continue to offer our digital valuation and viewing options. This enables us to complete a valuation in accordance with the seller's instructions, virtually.

Where a face-to-face meeting is required, we will use a health assessment form to assess any risk associated with each individual visit and confirm that we have also carried out an assessment of our team member visiting you. Remember, this is a two-way process so please make sure you disclose to us any symptoms when we ask you, in the same way that we would ensure that anyone we send to your property is free from such symptoms. This is designed to reassure everyone involved. All staff have been advised to never attend a valuation appointment if they are feeling unwell.

Where we do conduct a valuation, we will respectfully avoid any handshaking or physical contact, keeping our two-metre distance, and wear protective gloves. We may use face masks if recommended by the government, and of course will, if these are made mandatory.

We will demonstrate all our marketing via digital resources rather than leaving any paper documents at your property, all of which will be followed up by email.

This goes against the 'grain' for us, but we will keep any face-to-face contact to a minimum and respectfully decline any coffees/refreshments you may be kind enough to offer.

We will explain to you the actions our firm are taking to reduce the risk of spreading Coronavirus – reassuring you is paramount to us.

When we return to our vehicles after each appointment, we will safely dispose of our gloves and use hand-gel to give our hands a good wash. We will also wipe any equipment we have used during the visit.

When we arrive back at the office, we will be sure to wash our hands with soap and hot water before we do anything else. We will introduce signs around the office to ensure there are plenty of reminders.

At the end of each day and after our last appointment we will give our steering wheel, gear lever, handbrake, and all controls a wipe down with anti-bacterial wipes.

Where we receive an instruction to sell a property, we acknowledge that all other aspects of our legal obligations are still in force.

EPCs can continue to be provided if no COVID-19 issues exist and the assessor operates in accordance with Public Health England guidance.

VIEWINGS

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We will make full use of our virtual viewing tools and only arrange full viewings where the buyer is genuinely interested in the property.

We will always carry out the health-check on all viewers intending to visit the property.

We will ensure we find out who will be attending the viewing and limit the number of people to no more than two at any one time. Where possible we would ask the owner(s) and their family to vacate the property for the duration of the appointment, which we will do our best to limit to 15 minutes.

If the property is occupied, we will check on the health of the seller and all those in residence before arranging the appointment.

Where a physical viewing does take place, we will respectfully avoid any handshaking or physical contact and remember to keep our two-metre distance. We will wear protective gloves and avoid any paper documents. We may use face masks if recommended by the government and of course we will do so, if these are mandatory. As our agent will be wearing protective gloves, only the agent will be permitted to open doors to show potential buyers and tenants the rooms and storage etc.

When we return to our vehicles after each appointment, we will safely dispose of our gloves and use hand-gel to give our hands a good wash. We will also wipe any equipment we have used during the visit.

If the property is vacant and we are using a key, we will wipe the key when it is taken from the key cabinet, wipe it after the viewing and again before it is placed back in the key cabinet. We will never travel in the same car as anyone else, always meeting viewers at the property.



AML AND RIGHT TO RENT

AML:

We are still required to complete your legal requirements to confirm the identity of sellers and buyers, and landlords and tenants in some cases. This should be completed before a business relationship commences.

Using our own AML platform, we are able to action an electronic search if that is the only check required.

If we do need to take actual documents, the requirement is that this is completed where we can see the individual and the document at the same time – we will wear protective gloves when handling paper documents.

We will ask if you have ‘certified copies’ which you could supply as evidence of identity.

If customers are visiting our branch, we will complete the health assessment before they are permitted into the office. If they have previously done so, we will check there has been no change.

Any face-to-face visits in the office will only be undertaken where two-metre social distancing can be adhered to, or behind a designated desk with a protective screen.

HMRC have not provided any provision where none of the above is possible for health reasons, therefore, we suggest that we arrange a FaceTime or Zoom meeting to see both the individual and the document. In this case we would like you to scan across documents and we will clearly certify the method of testing we have used and the reason why.

As soon as possible, we will then arrange a face-to-face inspection and update our records. Our Money Laundering Officer will always sign off any request to proceed on this basis. This will only be used as a last resort and we would have to proceed with caution on any high-risk individual. If we are in any doubt, then we cannot proceed with the business relationship. We would have to refer to our Money Laundering Policy, keeping a clear note of all cases so that we can review them once restrictions are lifted in full.

RIGHT TO RENT (ENGLAND ONLY):

The Home Office have issued guidance that the Right to Rent checks should continue as normal, prior to any tenancy commencement.

The Home Office have permitted Face Time inspection of documents with the individual, followed by submission by email, providing a full inspection with the individual takes place within eight weeks of the restrictions being lifted. All such cases will be recorded for future action.

Where we do see tenants on a face-to-face basis, we will ensure the health assessment is completed prior to them being permitted into the office.

Any face-to-face visits in the office will only be undertaken where two-metre social distancing can be adhered to, or behind a designated desk with a protective screen.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

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Interim inspections – we will be using technology such as Face Time, Zoom or similar to achieve these. We will make clear notes of what we have seen, just as we would with a manual recording of an inspection.

It is important to ensure health and safety of tenants. Annual gas safety checks should continue; we can arrange these at any time from month 10 of the existing certificate, without impacting the expiry date. Gas Safe engineers are permitted to visit in accordance with Public Health England guidance.

Contractors may continue to visit properties to undertake maintenance and repair, but we will first complete our health assessment with the contractor. The contractor will visit in accordance with Public Health England guidance.

End of tenancy check out – we will be completing a virtual check-out, making sure that we have a copy of inventory and check-in reports available, and using these to cross reference any points. We will obtain our landlord and tenant's consent to using this method.

Where any face-to-face visit must take place in the property, we will ensure a health assessment is completed prior to the visit taking place. We will wear protective gloves, avoid any physical contact and on returning to our vehicle, we will safely dispose of our gloves and use hand-gel to give our hands a good wash. We will also wipe any equipment we have used during the visit.

Where a tenant is required to visit our office, we will ensure that full two-metre social distancing is observed and if possible, use a designated desk behind a protective screen.

Where any keys are issued, we will always wash our hands once this has happened and where keys are received back, wipe the keys and wash our hands.

We will avoid taking any cash or cheque payments from tenants where possible. If it is not possible, we will ensure that protective gloves are always worn.

For new tenancies, as a precaution we will operate a 'three-day void period' between previous tenants vacating and new tenants taking up residence. This is on results from research that has found the Coronavirus can still be detectable on surfaces for up to 72 hours.



SUMMARY

It is our sole intention to demonstrate a safe way to return to work, servicing our clients with health and safety as our primary concern. We welcome any further suggestions and will continue to review this policy to ensure it remains stringent. We thank you for doing business with us and appreciate you working with us under these new ways of operating, during this unusual period.



LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19

gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

gov.uk/coronavirus

