

Practice note: Supporting vulnerable tenants affected by Covid-19 (January 2021)



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

Tenants over 70 or those with underlying health problems are at particular risk of serious ill health if they contract Covid-19. This includes tenants with complex needs, mental health issues and people with learning disabilities. The government's guidance on staying at home and reducing all non-essential contact will mean that the way tenants are supported will need to change, whilst at the same time, the level of support they require may increase.

The health and wellbeing of tenants is a priority and organisations need to ensure they continue to provide the support people need during this crisis.

Social housing providers will need to consider:

- How to identify those tenants who are most at risk and require more support
- How that support can be delivered and by whom (whether the landlord or a partner organisation or community group)
- How to communicate in an effective, timely and regular way with tenants

For vulnerable tenants in general needs housing:

- Compile a list of all your tenants over 70, and those who may be vulnerable (receiving tenancy sustainment or support services for example) to prioritise for immediate telephone contact.
- Consider providing a telephone line that you advertise in general communications with tenants, advising potentially vulnerable and older tenants to get in touch to discuss what support they may need.
- Once you have compiled a list and made the initial contact, you may consider narrowing down a primary list of tenants who will need more regular contact to make sure they are managing. They may need daily or weekly contact.
- Contact tenants directly through telephone calls. This may be done by staff across a number of teams, where there is additional capacity as other services are scaled back, so a common script to use will make this easier

for staff and ensure you capture adequate information to inform any necessary action/ provide appropriate help, to include:

- Updating information about members of the household; next of kin; emergency contact details etc.
- Making sure that they are aware of the latest guidance on social distancing, when to stay at home and self-isolate. Guidance about Covid-19 is changing almost daily and ongoing reporting may increase the anxiety of tenants, so where possible, ongoing contact should be considered or links made with community and voluntary support, if the tenant wants this. (More information is available on CIH's website [here](#).)
- Identifying if they have experienced any symptoms, or if they are in a vulnerable group and self-isolating. If they are

Guidance for:

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

COVID-19
FACT SHEET

#CV19HOUSING

experiencing any symptoms, reinforcing public health guidance to self-isolate at home [Covid-19: stay at home guidance](#)

- Understanding what help they have already from friends and/ or family and what help they might still need. This may range from financial advice if their income is or will be affected, practical help with shopping or medication deliveries or any physical or mental health issues.
- Identify how these tenants might be supported, either through your own staff or connecting to local voluntary and community groups (with their agreement). Map out what voluntary and community groups exist and what help and support these might be able to provide to your tenants. [Covid-19 mutual aid UK](#) is an umbrella group that provides links to local groups and many are being developed to help older and vulnerable people.
- Identify if they have access to the internet, and ensure they know where you are publishing latest updates, tips and help from other organisations to support their health and wellbeing. Examples include resources from [MIND](#), supporting people's health and wellbeing. The UK Government has also published [guidance](#) for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of Covid-19.
- If available and appropriate, discuss with tenants the potential installation and use of call systems where this might help to mitigate any risk and support tenants to feel safe and connected.
- Alert staff internally and local authority partners if there is a significant safeguarding risk or immediate need for additional care.

For tenants in supported housing

- Where care teams are on site, for example in extra care housing or schemes for people with severe learning disabilities, they are well placed to lead the response as they will still be providing care directly to tenants as resources allow. For tenants not in receipt of a

care package, the housing staff and the care team should together ensure that they are aware of how all tenants are managing and what additional support they may require.

- The resources of care teams may be stretched both by increased need and staff illness/ self-isolation; providers need to work closely with the local authority and other providers to pool resources in the locality.
- Draw on housing staff and other teams (which may have additional capacity as other services are scaled back) to provide help and support remotely, through additional telephone support for tenants and wider communications (e.g. newsletters, social media) (More information is available in CIH's Covid-19 [factsheet #3 on supported housing](#). All of CIH's briefings for housing professionals can be found on our website [here](#).)
- Identify tenants who don't have friends or family that can help with things like shopping, and identify how they might be supported, either through your own staff or connecting to local voluntary and community groups (as above), with their agreement.
- Keep tenants safe by closing/ restricting access to communal areas, putting up notices reminding residents not to use them and reinforcing government guidance. Where schemes have on-site restaurants which will be closed, these can provide meals to be delivered to individuals in their own flats.
- Where tenants or carers still require access to laundries, a rota should be agreed and additional cleaning put in place as well as guidance for tenants to follow.
- With many communal areas closed, cleaners can be re-directed to increase cleaning of 'touch points', such as door handles, banisters, etc.
- Public health guidance on cleaning in flats and shared areas in non-healthcare settings can be found [here](#), including posters that summarise the advice and can be placed in and around communal spaces. Additional guidance has also been published by Health Protection Scotland and is available [here](#).

- Where there are suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus, tenants should be asked to keep to their own flats at all times.
- If a tenant is admitted to hospital, staff should liaise with them or their family to arrange a deep clean of their home, as close as possible to the discharge date. (More on action when tenants are discharged can be found below)
- If unfortunately a tenant should die from the coronavirus, a deep clean of communal areas may also be necessary. Staff resources should be put into ensuring that tenants are reassured about the action being taken to reduce wider risk on the scheme.

Where tenants are not complying with guidance:

- Ensure that you are communicating clearly and effectively to help tenants understand what is required (see below)
- Consider the reasons for their non-compliance and how you can support them to change behaviours.
- Work with family and friends/ existing support networks to reinforce guidance and required behaviours to keep them and other tenants safe.
- Where tenants continue to ignore advice, you may need to remind them of the obligations under their tenancy agreement. Police and public health officials have additional powers to address behaviour that puts people at risk (see more information in [CIH's factsheet #3 on supported housing](#)).

Communicating with tenants:

- [CIH practice sheet #2](#) provides helpful tips on engaging with tenants, drawing on discussions with housing providers.
- Use multiple methods of communicating with tenants including telephone calls, social media and letters/ newsletters.
- Provide clear and explicit advice in newsletters and posters placed in strategic places throughout schemes, such as at entrances to corridors, lounges and laundries.

- When communicating with tenants with specific needs, use tools developed by specialist organisations. These may also provide or know of additional help and support available, including helplines for tenants and relatives/ carers.
- Public health bodies have produced several posters and other resources. For providers in England these can be found [here](#). And for providers in Wales these can be found [here](#).
- Easy-read guidance and posters for people with learning disabilities are available from [Scottish commission for learning disability / Learning Disability Wales](#)
- Information for people living with dementia is available from [Alzheimer's Society](#) and [Dementia UK](#).
- An information video in British Sign Language is available from the deaf health charity [Signhealth](#)
- The Scottish government has produced [information](#) available in other languages to use. More about coronavirus and impacts on housing rights for migrants is also available [here](#).
- Ask tenants what other information and advice they might want - many will be concerned about other tenants living on the scheme or nearby and may value information on how they can help them as well.

Guidance on discharging people from hospital.

The Westminster government has set out [guidance](#) for the NHS, community health services, and social care staff in England, on working together to ensure that people are discharged in a timely way from hospital.

It identifies that the majority of people will be able to return and recover at home, some with support from community health and social care staff. The procedure directs that 'on decision of discharge, the patient and their family or carer, and any formal supported housing workers should be informed and receive the relevant

leaflet.' It also refers to existing procedures to ensure that people who are homeless are not discharged with no place to go to.

However, the decision to discharge is intended to lead rapidly to actual discharge. Housing staff can support an effective discharge from hospital by:

- Identifying key local contacts leading on hospital discharge within the hospital team and local adults social care
- Have a lead contact within your organisation (or local lead) to liaise with these teams

Ensure that information is clearly available for discharge staff on:

- The nature of the scheme and availability of care and support
- Times of staff of site where appropriate availability and scope/ extent of local voluntary support (and contact details if to be arranged directly rather than through housing staff).

Establishing with the discharge leads:

- Confirmation that the person has had a COVID-19 test before discharge
- If there is a requirement for the tenant to self-isolate and duration for that
- Any identified/ additional needs for care and support or when a follow up assessment will be carried out (and whether by community health services or adult social care)

Where a tenant is discharged who already has a care package, where possible a joint discussion between the care provider, the health/discharge team and the housing provider should take place to ensure that all partners have the necessary information to provide the best possible care and support to the person

What, if any, arrangements are in place for follow up calls/ checks from hospital/ GP etc.

If care is ongoing or required from an onsite care team, how to access to appropriate PPE (if arrangements for the scheme are not already in place)

What needs for community equipment has been identified, and when this is to be delivered

Any scheme management implications for staff/ other residents, in terms of contact with the tenant/ household

Establishing with carers/ family/ support networks if any food or other essentials will be required and arranging if so, through staff or volunteers

On the tenant's return, to discuss with them if they have any concerns or need for support (for example, food/ medicine collection, regular contact/ wellbeing checks etc) in the short/ medium term. Where identified, to arrange contact with local volunteer/ community groups/ residents groups that can support this.

Working with public sector, and voluntary and community partners to support tenants:

Given the impact that coronavirus is having on how we all live, it is unlikely that housing organisations on their own will be able to provide all the support tenants may need. You will need to consider how to work with public sector partners such as health and social care, as well as voluntary and community groups.