



# Apartment Living & COVID-19 Best Practice Guideline

## COMMITTEES

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease spread between people. Apartment buildings and other shared living spaces pose the potential risk of an infected resident spreading the virus to other residents. This is also known as community spread.

Whether you're a landlord, owner occupier, committee or a building owner, here is what you need to know about preparedness, communication and resident safety during the COVID-19 outbreak.

## Strata Meetings

Effective from 1 May 2020, changes to the [legislation](#) were made to allow owners corporations to conduct remote meetings in the ACT during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Both OC and EC meetings may be held electronically, for example, via a phone link, satellite link, internet, or intranet link.

An OC must first hold an in person meeting and pass an ordinary resolution which sets out the agreed methods of electronic communication, such as teleconference or videoconference.

If agreeing to new electronic meeting methods, OC's should make sure that all members have the ability to use the preferred electronic method or ensure that there is still a physical place in which members can attend if they need or want to.

## Electronic voting

An OC may, by resolution passed at a general meeting, agree to a way of voting on a matter, or class of matters, to be decided by the OC.

This means that an OC may allow electronic voting, for example, by teleconference, videoconference, email, or other electronic means. The OC may also allow electronic voting before the meeting at which the matter (other than an election) is to be decided.<sup>[38]</sup>

The OC and EC must ensure any voting via electronic method is appropriately recorded and included in the records of the owners corporation.

For more information visit:

<https://www.planning.act.gov.au/build-buy-renovate/reviews-and-reforms/managing-buildings-better/initial-package-of-reforms/meetings-and-voting>

Canberrans are being asked to stay at home to assist in our response to positive cases of COVID-19 in the ACT.

**The lockdown restrictions came into effect from 5:00pm Thursday 12 August 2021 and is scheduled to continue until 5:00pm Thursday 2 September 2021 at the earliest.**

The six essential reasons you can leave your home during this lockdown are:

- to buy essential groceries and medicine
- to access essential healthcare including in-home care
- for essential work
- to exercise outdoors for one hour per day in your region
- to get a COVID-19 test
- to get a COVID-19 vaccination.

Further information can be found here:

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/act-status-and-response/lockdown>

**All meetings must be conducted electronically until further notice from the ACT Government.**

# Apartment Living and COVID-19 for Committees

## Introduction

With a large percentage of the population already living or working in a Strata Community, the chances are high that you will have someone already living in your complex who is in self-quarantine or who has tested positive for COVID-19. It is also likely that this pandemic will be around for some months yet.

As our community is in lockdown, our building occupancy will be at capacity. Our buildings include all age groups, and everyone will be home for some weeks. During this time, we need to be tolerant, considerate of others and kind to each other.

Besides increasing hygiene measures and having a building-wide plan in place, it is critical to stop social gatherings, such as meet and greets, apartment complex meetings, or other activities in the building that require people to gather.

Advice on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 can be found here:

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy/protect-yourself#Physical-social-distancing>

## Are residents required to disclose to the Strata Community if they are self-quarantined or infected?

At this stage it is unknown if the Health Department intends to notify a Strata Community if it has issued a notice to a person to quarantine.

However, SCA has two recommendations for residents:

### Recommendation 1:

Health, safety and security of lot owners, occupiers of lots and others.

- » A lot owner or occupier must not use the lot, or permit it to be used, to cause a hazard to the health, safety and security of an owner, occupier, or user of another lot.

### Recommendation 2:

Behaviour of owners, occupiers, and invitees on common property.

- » An owner or occupier of a lot must take all reasonable steps to ensure that guests of the owner or occupier do not behave in a manner likely to unreasonably interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of any other person entitled to use the common property.

## What should we do if we are advised that someone is self-isolating or has contracted the infection?

If you are notified or become aware, you must keep their identity and specific location confidential, and only disclose such information to parties that need to know. The parties that need to know are:

### » Any contractors who service the site

This allows them to increase their own Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protocols. They only need to know specific details if they are providing a behind-the-door service.

### » The Strata Community Manager and Building Manager as applicable

They should be advised of which apartment in case something needs to be escalated.

### » Affected Resident

Provide details to the resident concerned as to what they must do with respect to delivery, visitors, rubbish, and any other property restrictions.

At this stage there is no clear advice from the Government on whether other residents need to be notified if someone is isolating or has COVID-19 with a building.

***We recommend calling the COVID-19 helpline (02) 6207 7244 for advice. Alternatively, if legal advice the ACT Law Society can be reached on (02) 6274 0300***

## What should we do about complaints?

Enforcing the rules is a Committee responsibility but during extreme circumstances, such as these, where building occupancy will be at maximum and everyone is living in close quarters, a Committee should act reasonably and carefully consider practical solutions to keep community harmony intact.

Some rules, which would normally be enforced, such as a prohibition against drying the washing on the balcony; minor infringements of “quiet enjoyment” and certain rules related to pets, may need to be interpreted in a manner which reflects the current circumstances (and may need to be relaxed). Common sense should be used.

## So, what does this mean for you as the Committee?

The Committee is the designated representative of all the owners (and by default, residents) that live in your development. You are legally responsible for ensuring the common property is maintained in a safe condition on behalf of the Strata Community. This remains the case, even if you contract with a strata manager.

At this stage there is very little information published by the Health Department as to any specific obligations a building owner has when providing shelter to a person with or suspected to have COVID-19.

However, the Government has introduced new containment measures for social distancing, as well as for non-essential services that includes pools and gyms. Committees should now close all pools and gyms within Strata Communities.

**NOTE:** By law, maintenance of the pool and other common property amenities is still necessary.

As the peak industry body for the strata industry, SCA have consulted with several professional organisations to develop this guide for Committees.

If you have a Building Manager, request a copy of their Pandemic Management Plan.

If you do not have a Building Manager, you will, together with your Strata Community Manager (if applicable), need to develop your own Pandemic Management Plan and consider a COVIDSafe Plan.

To do this you will need to:

- » Map your dependencies to understand where disruptions might impact your development. For example, greater parcel delivery, more visitors and impact on financial reserves;
- » Review the preparedness of your critical third parties (Fire, Pool, Cleaning, Waste removal etc.) as these services may be affected;
- » Create a communication platform to keep residents informed. This could be as simple as a daily or weekly bulletin in the lobby or using technology platforms; and
- » List the common areas most at risk for contamination and put in a management strategy for each area.

You remain responsible for management of contractors visiting the site. However, you are advised to not directly approach contractors and to instead communicate via telephone or other means which are not in-person.

If you have a Strata Community Manager, they will continue to organise your Contractors via official work orders. It may be necessary to delay non-essential work/activities on-site, however this will be done in consultation with the Committee as and when required.

## FACE MASKS

**Updated 12/8/2021 - During the period of the lockdown, unless lawfully exempted, you must wear a face mask at all times upon leaving your unit or apartment for everyone who is aged 12 years and over. Face masks must be worn in all indoor and outdoor communal areas of a complex. These areas include but are not limited to hallways, stairwells, lifts, lobbies and laundries. BBQ areas, pools and gyms are to be closed.**

Risk Area	Risk Control	Action
<p><b>POOL</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Close the Pool</p> <p>Continue maintenance of the pool – legal requirement.</p>	<p>Inform users:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That use of pool is at their own risk</li> <li>• To shower before use</li> <li>• Stay in their apartment if they don't feel well.</li> <li>• Implement social distancing with other users</li> <li>• Sit on their own towels</li> <li>• Wipe sweat with a disposable paper towel, dispose of correctly and wash their hands after.</li> <li>• Exercise social distancing</li> <li>• Increase cleaning schedule</li> </ul> <p>Consider closing the facilities; be guided by Government advice.</p>	<p>Create a sign or multiple signs and place around pool area notifying residents of established protocols.</p> <p>Notify residents of and reasons for closure and affix signs advising of same.</p>
<p><b>BBQ &amp; COMMUNITY AREA</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Close Areas</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Consider closure of the facility</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p> <p>Notify residents of protocols established for use.</p> <p>And/or notify residents of and reasons for closure if this decision is made. Affix signs to advise of protocols established or closure of facility.</p>
<p><b>TOILET &amp; SHOWERS</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Close any non-essential communal toilets and showers</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Consider shutting down the facilities</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p> <p>Notify residents of protocols established and reason for same. Affix signs in area of facility.</p>
<p><b>LIFT ACCESS</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 increased social distancing, try to limit capacity as much as possible and only use by residents and emergency services</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p>	<p>Consider hand sanitizer in lobby, request for the interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement social distancing requirements.</p>
<p><b>INTERCOM SYSTEM</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 stay at home orders in place</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p>	<p>Consider hand sanitizer in lobby, request in interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p>

Risk Area	Risk Control	Action
<p><b>LAUNDRY AREAS</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Stay home orders in in place</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Mandatory hot wash</p>	<p>Create a sign or multiple signs and place around Laundry to wash their hands before and after using laundry facility, to use detergent and hot water wash and recommend using the dryer to finish.</p> <p>Consider hand sanitizer in room, request for the interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate.</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement social distancing requirements. A booking system could be implemented to regulate numbers.</p>
<p><b>FRONT DOOR</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Stay home orders in in place. Only residents and emergency services to enter front door</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange increased cleaning regime; to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate.</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement social distancing requirements.</p>
<p><b>DOOR HANDLES</b></p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Stay home orders in in place</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning to at least daily, or more if a high use, are with increased risk of higher infection rate.</p>
<p><b>VENTILATION/AIR CONDITIONING</b></p> <p>Airborne contaminants</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Stay home orders in in place</p>	<p>Check if HEPA filters, consider upgrade if not</p> <p>Check if HEPA filters, consider upgrade if not.</p> <p>Advice on improving ventilation  <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/Improving-Ventilation-Home.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/Improving-Ventilation-Home.html</a></p>	<p>Review ventilation rates – increase fresh air rates if possible.</p>
<p><b>PLUMBING</b></p> <p>Emergency plumbing considered essential service from 12/08/21</p>	<p>Use of substitute paper products as toilet paper e.g., Newspaper, tissues or serviettes is to be discouraged</p> <p>Potential blockages, increasing health concerns and access to services</p>	<p>Convey concerns to all residents of potential problems and how it will impact them and ask them to comply.</p> <p>Notify contractors you will need to engage to fix problems that arise.</p> <p>There is a high risk to a plumber who must clear blocked sewer pipe. Needs to be advised if there is a positive case.</p>

Risk Area	Risk Control	Action
<p><b>COMMITTEE MEETINGS</b></p> <p>Surface contaminants</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Committee Meetings must be held remotely.</p>	<p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Wipe down tables, chairs etc. before and after use of committee meeting area</p> <p>Request a Committee Member not attend if they have travelled overseas recently, been in contact with someone who has, or has been in contact with someone who has contracted the virus or is known to have symptoms or has the virus themselves.</p> <p>Consider alternative means of communicating to make decisions.</p>	<p>Notify Committee members of the protocols established and request they comply.</p> <p>Consider alternative meeting solutions like Skype, ZOOM or telephone for discussion then use email ballots to capture decisions and create record.</p>
<p><b>GENERAL MEETINGS</b></p> <p>Surface contaminants</p> <p>Social Gathering</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 Committee Meetings must be held remotely.</p>	<p>Exercise social distancing</p> <p>Wipe down tables, chairs etc. before and after use of meeting area.</p> <p>Request Members not attend if they have travelled overseas recently, been in contact with someone who has, or has been in contact with someone who has contracted the virus or is known to have symptoms or has the virus themselves.</p> <p>Consider alternative means of communication and decision making.</p> <p>Consider deferring meeting.</p>	<p>Notify all lot owners of protocols established and request they comply.</p> <p>Consider other solutions like Skype, ZOOM, Voting on-line platforms, postal ballots etc</p>
<p><b>CONTRACTORS</b></p> <p>Safe worksite</p> <p>From 12/08/2021 only emergency work can take place, to see the classification of essential work visit <a href="https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/act-status-and-response/lockdown">https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/act-status-and-response/lockdown</a></p>	<p>Responsibility to maintain a safe worksite when contractors are engaged to work on the common property.</p> <p>Maintain social distancing from contractors working on site.</p> <p>Potential threat of coming into contact with the virus.</p>	<p>Committee to avoid contact or approaching trades persons when on site.</p> <p>Work orders to be issued by Committee or strata community management company; continue to require Safe Work Method Statements, which will now include additional processes including PPE and social distancing measures.</p> <p>Instruct all trades to operate as if someone with COVID-19 resides on site.</p> <p>If the strata community is notified of a person who has tested positive to the virus all contractors must be notified.</p>

This publication is only a guide. Readers should make and rely on their own expert enquiries. No warranty is given about the accuracy of the material and no liability for negligence or otherwise is assumed by SCA, its servants or agents in any way connected with this publication.

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*Please visit [Government Websites](#) for regular updates.*

## Government Information – Useful Links

### Website

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>

### Lockdown

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/act-status-and-response/lockdown>

### Face Mask Requirements

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/act-status-and-response/face-masks>

### COVID-19 exposure locations in the ACT

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/act-status-and-response/act-covid-19-exposure-locations>

### Quarantine

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy/quarantine-and-isolation/quarantine>

### Lockdown Requirements

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/act-status-and-response/lockdown#Stay-at-home>

### Vaccines

[COVID-19 vaccine - COVID-19 \(act.gov.au\)](#)

### Privacy

<https://www.oaic.gov.au/updates/covid-19-advice-and-guidance/>

### Mental Health and Wellbeing

<https://www.health.act.gov.au/services-and-programs/mental-health/mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-covid-19>

### How to protect yourself

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy/protect-yourself>

### Access Help – Payments

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/community/access-help>

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/covid-19-disaster-payment-australian-capital-territory>

### Tenants

<https://justice.act.gov.au/renting-and-occupancy-laws/information-tenants-and-occupants-impacted-covid-19>

### WORKSAFE ACT

<https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/>

### Meetings and Voting

<https://www.planning.act.gov.au/build-buy-renovate/reviews-and-reforms/managing-buildings-better/initial-package-of-reforms/meetings-and-voting>



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25 August 2021