



MARYLAND **MULTI-HOUSING** ASSOCIATION, INC.

## **25 Rental Housing Operational Tips for Getting Through COVID-19**

### **CORPORATE MANAGEMENT OFFICE ATTENDANCE**

1. Use remote and flexible working alternatives to exercise the Center for Disease Control's social distancing recommendation to reduce direct contact among corporate employees.
2. For those who must report to work from an office or other location, maintain a 6- to 10-foot distance between yourself and other employees and work in separate enclosed office spaces, if possible.
3. Keep community spaces closed (e.g. break rooms, gyms, coffee areas) and do not allow the public, even visitors or customers, in the building. Respond to inquiries through phone call or email.
4. Determine office hours and closures on a week-by-week basis.

### **COMMUNICATION**

5. Maintaining communication is key for residents and employees to remain informed. More communication is better than less.
6. Communication regarding COVID-19 should remain through one point-of-contact. For example, for headquarters, all communication should come through a single point of contact (usually the human resources department). For apartment communities, the point-of-contact for all residents and supplier partners should remain the same (usually the property manager) or through a portal.
7. Consistency of messaging will mitigate confusion and misinformation.
8. When writing communications, refer to the CDC's website for definitions on COVID-19 related verbiage such as self-quarantined isolation, testing

positive, social distancing, etc. It is important that all employees use all terms correctly.

9. Hold executive and regional leadership meetings regularly, perhaps even every day, to discuss updates on COVID-19 and determine any course of action before disseminating the information to staff members and residents.

## **INFECTION**

10. If an employee or resident tests positive, they are under the purview of the CDC, the State of Maryland, and their doctor's care, reporting solely to these entities.
11. Residents are not required to inform apartment offices or housing providers of a COVID-19 diagnosis. However, if a resident notifies a housing provider, housing providers should post a notice and send an email from the main point-of-contact (do not name the resident, the apartment number, or the floor the resident resides on, etc.) to other residents guiding them to take caution. Inform internal staff to avoid contact with the infected unit.
12. Consider extending PTO for infected employees. It takes four days to get tested for potential symptoms, and an additional ten days of quarantining, if infected. Keep in mind that employers cannot directly ask an employee whether they have COVID-19. The employee must volunteer the information, and remain anonymous among other staff members.
13. If an employee reports they have been exposed, require the individual and any direct team members to be tested and self quarantined

## **AMENITIES AND SERVICE REQUESTS**

14. Only respond to emergency service requests (e.g. flooding, fire, refrigerator malfunction or toilet failure) to ensure the safety of community staff and other residents.
15. Ask infection-related questions before responding to a service request or entering a unit (e.g., "have you been exposed to someone with COVID-19?"). Handle initial service requests online or over the phone.
16. While fulfilling work orders, ensure that staff members wear masks and gloves. View every unit as "potentially infected."

17. Close all public spaces and amenities in the apartment complex. Deeply sanitize all areas which must remain in operation (e.g., elevators, lobbies, stairwells).
18. Halt activity in package overflow rooms and direct packages to be directly delivered to resident units.
19. Provide online resources, FAQs, and trainings for halted resident services.
20. Consider slowing or stopping non-essential unit and building renovations.

### **RENTAL RATES AND NEW LEASES**

21. If possible, offer alternative virtual touring options. For all in-person tours, avoid handshakes and other personal contact. Maintain 6- to 10-foot distancing.
22. Consider providing “early-bird specials” or other rental deals to incentivize new and existing residents to pay rent ahead of time.
23. The State of Maryland has enacted a “no-eviction” policy, so it is important to establish protocol and resources for delayed rent-paying options. Consider requiring residents to provide “Proof of Job Loss” documentation if they experience unemployment due to COVID-19 measures.
24. Consider halting slated rent increases or price adjustments for 2020, in order to prevent turnover or financial loss.
25. Considering stopping Due Diligence and in-home inspections, except on a “life-safety basis.” If an inspection must take place, use masks and gloves when entering the unit.