

COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment

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Purpose: To educate National Apartment Association (NAA) members on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Applies to: Maintenance personnel and other NAA members who are involved in onsite operations and interacting with community residents, colleagues and other industry partners.

Overview: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has cited recent studies that indicate both a significant portion of individuals infected with coronavirus lack symptoms (“asymptomatic”) and that those who eventually develop symptoms (“pre-symptomatic”) can transmit the virus to others prior to showing symptoms. Because of this, personal protective equipment (PPE) is encouraged for the safety of employees and residents alike. The CDC offers recommendations regarding environmental cleaning and disinfection on a large scale and NAA urges its members to follow them. However, obtaining the necessary equipment and protective gear may prove difficult for many housing providers, especially if there are many apartments in the portfolio. It may make sense in some cases to consider outsourcing this task to licensed contractors that have the necessary safety apparatus, cleaning products and proven familiarity with health regulations.

Guidance:

1. **Protect Yourself** – It is important to follow basic hygienic and social-distancing precautions, which include staying home if you are ill, washing your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and to avoid touching your face. Avoid shaking hands and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (phones, computers, desks, doorknobs). Whenever possible, substitute face-to-face meetings for email and teleconferences. As there is a period of time from exposure to symptoms, all persons should always take appropriate precautions, even if residents appear well.
2. **Face Masks** – The CDC recently altered their guidance of not recommending the use of masks in non-health-care settings to recommending wearing cloth face coverings in public. A face mask is a device designed to use a seal to the skin around the face to prevent small particulates from gaining access to the respiratory system and a face covering is a cloth to aid in containing the respiratory

droplets exhaled when coughing or talking. Your company can decide what type of face mask, if any, to use based on policy and availability. It may be considered in situations such as entering a resident's apartment for an emergency service request. If you have facial hair, it could break the seal of a facial mask, rendering it ineffective. The CDC created an [infographic](#) to illustrate how to properly wear masks with certain facial hair styles.

3. **Gloves** – For routine task, using your ungloved hands and then properly washing them often is the best advice. If using gloves, take them off right away after completing a task and place them in the trash, followed immediately by washing your hands. To prevent the risk of cross contamination, NAA advises the use of one-time disposable gloves. Change gloves for each apartment or task and remember not to touch your face. To prevent contamination, proper removal of gloves should be done in accordance with CDC [guidance](#).
4. **Additional Coverage** – Other PPE may include shoe covers, clothing covers, goggles and head caps. At present, NAA is not recommending the use of these items and stresses the importance to only use such supplies when necessary. As recommendations continue to change, NAA encourages members to follow the CDC for updates. Before deciding to use or make PPE available, be sure to review business policies for compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) standards. Should your company use hazmat suits and other protection items, it is important to train staff on proper usage of such items to include removal to prevent further exposure.
5. **Availability** – PPE has become scarce during the COVID-19 pandemic. If specific equipment is unavailable, you may consider authorizing a pre-order for shipment as soon as an item is back in stock. The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that severe and mounting disruption to the global supply of PPE – caused by rising demand, panic buying, hoarding and misuse – is putting lives at risk. N95 respirator masks and gowns are the most common back-ordered items, according to the CDC.
6. **Fair Housing** - Persons with COVID-19 may be regarded as having a disability just as persons with other communicable diseases have been regarded as having a mental or physical impairment that qualifies as having a disability under the Fair Housing Act. Decisions for PPE should be made with the intent to create the same level of response to ensure consistency with all residents and limit the risks of discriminatory claims.
7. **Cleaning Protocol** — A strong focus by staff should be placed on sanitizing work areas, public areas and commonly touched places (door handles, elevator buttons, etc.) and placing hand sanitizer stations in common areas. Specific attention should be made to common entry points and exits such as elevators and stairwells. In addition, closing and providing limited access to common areas and amenity spaces should be considered. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ([EPA](#)) released a [list](#) of EPA-registered disinfectant products that are qualified for use against this strain of coronavirus through the agency's Emerging Viral Pathogen program. As information is updated daily for COVID-19, recommendations are changing accordingly.
8. **Service Requests** — Service requests should be considered regarding the safety of maintenance employees and residents alike. To limit exposure, it should be considered to defer non-essential maintenance, resulting in only handling emergency or urgent issues as allowed by applicable law. Other activities that may cease include pre-renewal inspections and standard interior preventive maintenance. Maintenance associates should wear disposable, latex exam-type gloves when performing service in an occupied apartment home and thoroughly wash their hands after completing any service. The CDC advises that COVID-19 can live on some surfaces for up to three days. Additionally, please contact appropriate local counsel for questions concerning provisions in your

lease documents that speak to the timeframe for service requests, your liability for not performing and relief from performance.

9. **Office Operations** – Notify residents to avoid visiting the office if possible, as this is a preventive measure that will help both residents and the onsite staff to stem the spread of coronavirus. Prevent person-to-person contact whenever possible to include no handshaking. To further promote social distancing, encourage all residents to utilize their community website, resident portal and email for all service requests, rent payments and general questions, where applicable. Employees should handle all money collection with disposable gloves and wash their hands accordingly. Follow the guidance of the local public health agency concerning package deliveries. If you accept package delivery in the office, consider using disposable gloves when touching packages.

Related Links and Forms

[CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)

[How to Handle Maintenance during COVID-19](#)

[Can a Mask Protect Me? Putting Homemade Masks in the Hierarchy of Controls](#)

About NAA

The National Apartment Association (NAA) serves as the leading voice and preeminent resource through advocacy, education and collaboration on behalf of the rental housing industry. As a federation of more than 150 state and local affiliates, NAA encompasses over 82,000 members representing more than 10 million apartment homes globally. NAA believes that rental housing is a valuable partner in every community that emphasizes integrity, accountability, collaboration, community responsibility, inclusivity and innovation. NAA thanks its strategic partners Maintenance Supply Headquarters and Yardi. To learn more, visit www.naahq.org.