

Social Distancing and Pest Control Operations In Multi-Family Housing During the COVID-19/Coronavirus Outbreak

It's likely pest control is the last thing on your mind if you are managing or working in multifamily housing with elderly or disabled residents during the outbreak of COVID-19 (commonly referred to as coronavirus). We are all trying to keep the most vulnerable in our families and communities safe during this pandemic and must consider what social distancing and quarantine means for multifamily housing.

If you aren't already, you may very shortly be contending with issues such as:

- Availability of employees (absences for illness, quarantine, or at-home childcare)
- The need for extra disinfection and cleaning activities
- Pest complaints
- Concerns about whom to allow into your buildings

Ultimately, decisions need to be made by the building or housing authority management, with advice from your local public health department. Each management group will have to base their decisions on a variety of factors, including area COVID-19 cases, your population of vulnerable and at-risk residents, priority for disinfecting "common-touch" areas, and staffing levels.

During the initial stages of this epidemic, the goals of your effort should be to

1. **maximize social distancing** while we go through the most critical, initial stages of this pandemic;
2. **prioritize labor** required for regular disinfection, garbage management, food delivery, and other acute and immediate needs;
3. **ensure healthy staff are available** to fill in for those who may require quarantine or those having to deal with child care or other issues.

As the pandemic progresses, some of these goals may be adjusted depending on new cases appearing and people getting into a new routine.

There have been concerns expressed about pest control visits in public housing and what should be considered essential and non-essential. Below are a set of general guidelines to help make choices about your pest control service. These guidelines relate to housing sites with in-house pest management staff, but they can be applied to contracted service as well.

Also below are related recommendations for engaging with your pest control contractor, along with some resources from HUD and the CDC that will give you more guidance on policies, procedures, and disinfecting.

Advice on Pest Control Visits

Pest prevention practices that *should not* be suspended during the COVID-19 outbreak include:

- Garbage collection
- Call center operations taking calls about pest complaints; questions should be asked to determine severity for later prioritization
- Control of rats in residences (any infestation level) or a bat is found in the residence, or common spaces
- Common-area pest inspection/treatments in high-rise hallways, maintenance areas, garbage rooms, and garbage chutes; findings of any pests in the hallways should be recorded for later proximate-apartment follow-up
- In-apartment cockroach, bed bug, or mouse treatments for high-level infestations in residences, or lower-level infestations if:
 - A resident has a non-COVID-19 medical issue involved, such as asthma (as a result of pandemic response measures, we currently have people spending more time in their home, exposed for longer periods to possible asthmogens and respiratory irritants)
 - A resident complains about a pest infestation and consents to treatment

Here are some other considerations for helping those complaining about low-level infestations during this time, with a goal of providing temporary relief while adhering to social-distancing guidelines to the greatest degree possible:

- Can you give them information and tools like sticky monitors/traps and delay scheduling a pest control service visit?
- Can you recommend that they vacuum? Or can you drop off a HEPA-rated vacuum that they can use to remove the pests themselves?

As a rule, use your discretion and seek the advice of public health officials.

How Long Could We Suspend Regular (In-Home) Service?

Aside from the above considerations about what should not be stopped, depending on COVID-19 risks, there may have to be a suspension of regular (in-apartment) activities for 1.5 to 2 months (essentially one-to two pest generations, and depending on the progress of the epidemic in the area). Pest control staff (or contractors) can use any extra time they have to continue implementing exclusion measures in common areas/maintenance areas/exterior when not dealing with COVID-19-related issues. However, note that any type of delay in pest management procedures will result in dealing with potentially more severe and extensive infestations. It is critical to resume routine pest management operations as soon as possible after the risk of COVID-19 transmission has passed.

That means if you have regular (monthly) pest control service or inspections scheduled in people's homes, redirect that time and attention to common and maintenance areas. Purchase or ask your pest control company to provide tools that residents can apply in their own homes (monitors, cockroach bait stations, traps) and give residents advice on non-chemical DIY treatments like laundry and vacuuming.

Stay Engaged with Your Pest Control Team

The pests won't be going anywhere anytime soon, so stay engaged with your pest control providers. Some things you might want to discuss:

- **Can the pest control contractor leave glue boards and snap traps in the office?** Residents who complain about cockroaches and rodents may use these materials to avoid having outside visitors come into their homes, thus starting the pest control process and attempting some relief while reducing the potential for spreading the virus.
- **Can the contractor provide disinfecting services?** Many of the EPA-registered disinfectants require a license to apply (depending on the state and their current enforcement of licensing laws, given this declared health emergency). Your pest control company may be licensed and have access to disinfectant products. Remember, cleaning is not disinfecting! Many techniques are different. It's advisable that professionally trained and equipped technicians provide this service.
- **Are the pest control technicians equipped with and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)?** Most pest control companies have gloves, masks, and even disposable suits intended to be worn over their clothing. Make sure the technicians are wearing PPE to protect themselves and your residents. PPE, especially gloves, should be changed between apartments.

General Management Advice

Some general advice pulled from various pest control and HUD resources:

- **Get an email out to your pest control team right away.** If you have not already done so, now is the time to communicate with your staff (and residents) so they know you are responding proactively and not just reacting.
- **If you have not done so already, find a safe way to hold maintenance staff meetings, morning muster, etc.** Follow local public health guidelines and find a way to communicate without in-person and close-contact meetings: provide space so people do not cluster, set up meetings outside, or use video chat.
- **Add an update on your website that states what you are doing and what residents can do.** If a resident is curious, they can at least see that you are being proactive, not reactive.

Additional Resources

HUD maintains a COVID-19 resource page: <https://www.hud.gov/coronavirus>

HUD is advising that properties should be following the **CDC's guidelines** when creating policies and making decisions: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

HUD encourages owners and agents to follow CDC guidelines and the directions given by local health officials for emergency preparedness. See the Multifamily Asset Management and Project Servicing handbook. Specifically, Chapter 38 of [Handbook 4350.1](#), **Emergency and Disaster Guidance**, should also be consulted.

Environmental **cleaning and disinfecting recommendations** from the CDC:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

The CDC offers **print material**, including handouts you can distribute and posters to hang in offices or share with residents on bulletin boards:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>

When normal operating funds are not sufficient to address the COVID-19 needs of your properties, “reserve for replacement funds” may be accessed. See this **guidance on COVID-19 for Multifamily properties** for more information and good links:

https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/Housing/documents/MF_Corona_QA_FINAL_3-12-20.pdf

PHA-related waiver requests should be sent to [PIH Disaster Relief@hud.gov](mailto:PIH_Disaster_Relief@hud.gov)

PIH dedicated email address for COVID-19 questions: PIH-COVID@hud.gov

Pest Management

While StopPests can't do in-person trainings at this time, you can always view pre-recorded trainings on pest control at your own desk: <http://www.stoppests.org/ipm-training/training-opportunities/stoppests-webinars/>

Information and videos for those needing to remove bed bugs by hand:

<https://www.bedbugs.umn.edu/bed-bug-control-in-residences/controlling-bed-bugs-by-hand>

Bed bug information for building managers from Rutgers: <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/bed-bug/building-managers.php>

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<https://www.entsoc.org/muve/initiatives-urban>

To find a MUVE member or urban entomologist and resources in your state contact stoppests@cornell.edu and we'll help find your extension specialist.