

Safer Showings During the COVID-19 pandemic

UPDATE: This document has been updated to align with Provincial Health Officer orders and directives up to and including April 2021. Real estate professionals must continue to adapt to protect themselves, consumers and communities from COVID-19.

REALTORS® must continue to manage risks of showings as infections rise

The acceleration in the number of COVID-19 infections in British Columbia means we must all continue our efforts to slow the spread of the disease in accordance with public directives and public health orders from the Provincial Health Office. The British Columbia Real Estate Association (BCREA), the Office of the Superintendent of Real Estate (OSRE) and the Real Estate Council of BC (RECBC) continue to strongly recommend against open houses. This document contains best practices for hosting safer showings as an alternative to open houses and reflects that rental or home viewings are restricted to a maximum of six people, subject to each person present being able to keep two metres away from every other person present at all times. To support public health measures and reduce the spread of COVID-19, we strongly recommend masks be worn by all individuals present at a showing.

By using the 10 best practices below, you can help ensure that you've assessed, prepared for, and helped prevent potential health risks to yourself, your family, clients, colleagues, and consumers when conducting showings.

1. Consider Your Clients' Best Interests First

Given the growth in COVID-19 transmission rates, it's important that buyers and sellers understand the risks inherent in showings. When discussing showings as part of marketing a client's property, it's important to discuss all the different risk factors, from the spread of COVID-19 to concerns from neighbours or tenants, as well as the precautions that can reduce some of these risks. These risks can differ depending on whether a home is vacant, owner-occupied, tenant occupied or a strata unit in a multi-tenanted building.

Only after assessing the risks and understanding the required precautions can sellers make an informed decision to accommodate showings.

Remember, the brokerage determines the services they offer to clients. If it's not in the Schedule "A", you are not obligated to provide those services. If it is in the Schedule "A" and you are concerned with the risks, you should discuss this with your client and your managing broker.

Realtors representing buyers must also ensure buyers' interests are protected. This means helping buyers understand and reduce the risks of contracting or spreading COVID-19 while attending private showings, as well as the risks of buying a property sight unseen. You can advise buyers the steps they can take to better protect themselves, such as only attending a showing after reviewing all information and virtual marketing and, when they do attend a showing, wearing a mask and observing physical distancing.

2. Understand and Stay Informed of Safety Protocols

Provincial restrictions remain in place to help stop the spread of COVID-19, including restrictions on social gatherings at private residences and non-essential travel. As such, Realtors are encouraged to explore virtual and remote tools to limit in person interactions and when scheduling private showings, to do so in a manner that limits visitors to serious buyers only (see items #4 and #5 below for more).

When private showings are conducted, rental and home viewings are restricted to a maximum of six people, if space allows. It's important that Realtors understand the implications of this public health order and other changes to safety guidelines.

This limit on home viewings applies to both inside and outside the home, meaning consumers cannot wait on the property if another showing is already underway. Consumers should also understand that in the case of smaller properties, six people might be too many to still allow for safe physical distancing.

Realtors should ensure that viewings are scheduled at appropriate intervals to allow for sufficient time to clean, sanitize, and ventilate the property between viewings.

We strongly recommend that masks are also worn when in common areas for multi-tenanted properties and all those in attendance at the showing.

Your brokerage also has its own policies and procedures, which may include additional health and safety requirements. These should be the foundation of the protocols that you put in place to ensure

safe showings. You can view the Checklist for Managing Brokers that BCREA, OSRE and RECBC created to help guide brokerages [here](#).

3. Clearly Communicate and Document Safety Protocols

When working with a seller, discuss what measures need to be in place to ensure a safe showing and who will be responsible for these measures. Be sure to document your recommendations as well as what was agreed to, particularly when it comes to sanitizing and ventilating a property between showings. To support public health measures and reduce the spread of COVID-19, we strongly recommend masks be worn by all individuals present at a showing.

Once you have agreed to safety protocols for a showing, consider including a link to them on the MLS® listing. When working with a buyer's agent, ask them to confirm that the buyer understands and agrees to all the safety protocols and to following public health orders.

Clearly communicate any safety protocols you will follow to all your clients and consider posting these protocols on your website. Also consider using the CREA Coronavirus Statement & Consent form, available on WEBForms®, BCREA's COVID-19 Notice and Acknowledgement form or, as appropriate, your brokerage's waiver form.

4. Reduce In-person Interactions by Leveraging Technology

Reducing in-person interactions is an important way you can help control the spread of COVID-19. This means continuing to take every opportunity to use technology to reduce in-person contact (e.g., virtual open houses, showings and executing documents remotely) and reserving in-person private showings for serious buyers only (see item #5 below).

Let your clients know that you can provide real estate services and market their home effectively using the array of technological tools available. Virtual showings and transactions are an impactful way to help market properties while protecting our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When working with buyers, encourage them to review the MLS® listing details/photos in full, including any floor plans, 3D renderings, videos or additional information before requesting a showing. Buyers should also be encouraged to drive by and be familiar with the physical location of the property before requesting a showing.

5. Pre-screen Buyers Before Booking a Showing

In addition to ensuring that no more than six people, including Realtors and occupants, attend a showing, try to limit showings to serious buyers by screening for qualifying consumers who:

- have already listed or sold their current home,
- are working with a Realtor,
- are prequalified or have means to finance the purchase.

This is in addition to ensuring that prospective buyers have familiarized themselves with the information available on the property, photos, videos, 3D floorplans and other information and have driven past the property before requesting a showing.

6. Plan in Advance

To help ensure the safety of those attending the showing, confirm in advance that all attendees will follow public health orders and your client's and brokerage's safety protocols. Be prepared to follow the instructions of your client and brokerage regarding access to the property for anyone who is not following directions.

If you are representing the seller, send an email to the buyer's agent prior to the showing reminding them of the safety protocols, for example:

- no more than six people may attend, including Realtors and occupants;
- anyone with COVID-19 symptoms, who has been exposed to COVID-19 or who has travelled outside of the country within the last 14 days may not attend;
- when a property is being used for the purpose of a showing, request that masks be worn and strongly recommend masks be worn in all common areas for multi-tenanted properties (consider having disposable masks available in case prospective buyers forget to bring their own); and
- physical distancing must be observed.

If representing the buyer, send an email to the seller's agent prior to the showing requesting that:

- they request the occupants will not be in attendance, note that the tenant is not required to leave when the rental unit is shown;
- they confirm the sellers, and anyone on the premises, do not have any COVID-19 symptoms, have not been exposed to COVID-19 or have not travelled outside of the province or country within the last 14 days;

- occupants and the listing Realtor wear masks in the home and in common areas (for multi-tenanted properties) if they plan on being present; and
- anyone in attendance will observe physical distancing.

7. Keep Safety in Mind During the Showing

Before entering the property, confirm with the seller that the home has been [cleaned and that common spaces are disinfected](#). This should include door handles, counters, light switches or anywhere someone may touch. All lights should be on and doors open (including closets) so that all areas prospective buyers may wish to see are accessible without touching surfaces. Be sure to provide hand sanitizer/disinfectant at the property and ask that everyone attending use it as they enter the property. It is also important to consider proper ventilation by reducing air recirculation and increasing the outdoor air intake as much as possible, as recommended by WorkSafeBC.

Remain two metres away from others during the showing and avoid physical contact like shaking hands.

8. Consider the Requirements of Multi-Tenanted Properties

Minimize risks for landlords and tenants, review the guidance provided by the [Residential Tenancy Branch](#) to understand tenant and landlord rights and obligations. For multi-tenanted properties, discuss with the seller whether the strata council has any additional COVID-19 safety protocols to be aware of beyond what is included in the public health orders and this document and incorporate these into your plan. Just as you need to consider who will be responsible for the sanitizing and ventilation of the property being shown, you will need to consider what cleaning protocols will be required for common areas and who will do them.

As other building occupants may be concerned about showings, consider getting permission to share the safety protocols you will be following in common areas of multi-tenanted properties. For your safety and the safety of others, ensure physical distancing is maintained. We strongly recommend that masks be worn inside a property and in all common areas.

For more about selling tenanted properties, view the Selling Tenant-Occupied Properties During the COVID-19 Pandemic guidance from BCREA, OSRE and RECBC [here](#).

9. Safely Conclude the Showing.

At the end of the showing, leave lights on and windows and interior doors as found to minimize touchpoints in the home. Follow up with your client to ensure that proper sanitization and ventilation procedures have been carried out, which will have been agreed upon prior to the showing. Be sure to disinfect keys and lockboxes on exiting the home.

10. Anticipate and Respond to Community Concerns

You may hear concerns from others in the neighbourhoods and strata properties where you are showing properties. Whether online or in-person, be prepared to respond to concerns with professionalism and empathy. Remember Dr. Bonnie Henry's words, "Be kind, be calm, be safe." By communicating clearly about the precautions and safety protocols you are following, you can help members of the public understand that you are acting responsibly to protect their health and safety. Keep in mind that your actions can influence the public's perception of the entire real estate profession.

To ensure you have the most current information on COVID-19 prevention and risks visit the [BCCDC website](#) and for provincial restrictions visit the [government of BC website](#) and for landlord or tenant rights and obligations, visit the [Residential Tenancy Branch website](#).