

Coronavirus - What to Do Now?

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The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has all of us on tenterhooks, wondering where the next case will occur. The 24/7 news cycle gives us a constant drumbeat of bad news about the virus, heightening a sense of impending doom. With a growing number of confirmed cases in New Jersey and New York and both Governors Murphy and Cuomo having declared states of emergency, forward-thinking board members and professionals are thinking about what can be done.

The Community Associations Institute has posted common sense suggestions that can be viewed by [clicking here](#). The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has suggestions for individuals to reduce their risk ([CDC Coronavirus Information](#)) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides reliable information about ongoing developments ([HUD Coronavirus Information](#)). The latter two sites do not have specific recommendations for community associations but contain valuable information about the disease and how people should protect themselves. While there are strategies for associations to employ in combating the spread of the virus, each of us is ultimately responsible for taking the necessary precautions to reduce the spread of the virus and protect ourselves. It is important that when boards and managers communicate with their residents they indicate that while the association is monitoring precautionary strategies they can employ, the main defense to the disease lies with each resident.

It is not too soon to share the CAI, CDC and HUD links with your residents and suggest they read and observe the suggestions in them.

There are, of course, significant differences between high- and mid-rise buildings and age restricted clubhouses where people frequently gather or come into contact with others in elevators, meeting spaces, fitness rooms, and the like, and HOAs or townhouse communities where there is little regular interaction and no public meeting places. Where there are higher risk areas in your community, consider the following recommendations:

- Urge residents not to use common areas when sick. And, for those residents who have frequent guests, limit or reduce guest usage for the near future. If confirmed cases occur in your geographical area, consider imposing a rule that prohibits guests.
- Advise residents and guests to practice social distancing, placing at least 3 feet between themselves and others and limiting exposure to group gatherings.
- In mid- and high-rise buildings consider limiting deliveries of packages or food to the lobby and require residents to pick up packages or food there so outside

- vendors don't go through the building.
- If there is Airbnb and other short-term rental activity occurring in your community that violates your governing documents, work with association counsel to curb that activity.
 - Place hand sanitizer stations in high traffic areas in the community. Although hand-sanitizer dispensers are in short supply or unavailable, individual bottles of sanitizer remain available in some locations and can be placed in locations such as gyms, lobbies, and meeting rooms.
 - Require association employees to follow personal protections including not touching their eyes, nose, or mouth, regularly washing their hands after touching packages or surfaces such as door handles, and avoiding contact with sick people. And, perhaps most importantly, employees should be encouraged to stay home when sick. If your association does not provide adequate sick or personal days for employees, now is the time to grant exceptions to that policy.
 - [Click here](#) to download, print and post a poster from the CDC that states its recommendations for personal hygiene in your public areas.
 - Speak to association counsel before engaging in conversations with potential purchasers or potential renters about COVID-19 and their possible travel-related exposure.
 - Make sure you have updated emergency contact information for all owners, but particularly for any residents who may be more vulnerable.
 - Let your residents know that if they are feeling ill or have any questions or concerns that they can contact the New Jersey Department of Health's 24-hour hotline which can be reached at **1-800-222-1222**.

Associations should seriously consider conducting board and committee meetings by telephone or video conference. Where a board meeting is required to be open to membership, use a facility that allows owners to listen to the call or video conference. If an outbreak occurs in your area, consider closing fitness rooms and other meeting places.

We have been asked whether it is permissible to have visitors to a building with a concierge sign-in form related to COVID-19. In our opinion, such a form indicating whether the visitor has a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, and whether he or she has traveled outside of the country in the last 21 days and, if so, to where, is appropriate and prudent. If a visitor reports having any current symptoms or indicates having traveled to any area where COVID-19 is prevalent, it is within the board's ability to prohibit the visitor from remaining in the building. We suggest, however, that if the association considers putting such a policy in place that the board contacts counsel to draft the policy.

Finally, it is important that the board convey an attitude of concern but remain calm. For now, our message to trustees is to consider the possible steps outlined above, but most of all to approach this reasonably, as with any crisis. As leaders in your community your residents will look to you for guidance. If you appear panicked, they will panic as well. Notify your residents that the association is monitoring the situation and provide them with tips owners can do to avoid illness. As necessary, the association board should discuss developments with its community association professionals and take such precautions as are warranted in its best business judgment.