



COVID-19 LOT OWNER BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

PREPARED BY

Strata Community
Association (Qld)



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community
association®
QLD

Lot Owner Best Practice Guide

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Apartment Living and COVID-19

The World Health Organisation has announced that COVID-19 is a pandemic.

States and Territories have started declaring a State of Emergency commencing 16th March 2020 for at least the next 4 weeks with possible extensions. Containment measures are increasing daily. Non-essential services have been shut down from midday 23rd March, including pools and gyms.

With a large percentage of the population already living or working in a Strata Community the chances are high that you will have someone already in self-quarantine or who has tested positive for COVID-19, living in your complex. It is also likely that this Pandemic will be around for some months yet.

As your community moves to lockdown, your buildings will be at capacity and will include all age groups. Everyone will be home for some weeks and quite possibly feeling under pressure with the uncertainty of the current circumstances. During this time, all residents should be encouraged to be tolerant, considerate and kind to each other. A common courtesy that may be tested during these potentially challenging times.

Social Distancing

The Government has asked us all to practice social distancing. This means keeping your distance from people when using the common property and services such as hallways, stairs and lifts as applicable to your property, avoid non-essential large groups and work from home where possible. On a broader scale it also means avoiding non-essential travel.

This means that the Committee will need to close any or all community areas such as pools, gyms, BBQ, roof tops and any other community spaces. Please obey any signs indicating an area has been closed off.

Please be mindful of other residents when using lifts and hallways and keep a minimum of 1.5m from others.

More information on social distancing can be found [here](#).

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Self-Isolation or Quarantine

If you are voluntarily quarantining yourself or are living with someone under isolation and you live in an apartment, you have obligations to other residents, and you need to respect their right to a safe and hazard free environment. Self-isolation is not forced quarantine but if you do venture out you should take the precautions as notified by the Health Department as well as adhere to any local Committee policies and avoid using the common shared areas.

If you have received an order from the Health Department, you must follow the instructions contained in the order. If you're living with someone under isolation, wash your hands frequently, wear a surgical mask if caring for them and avoid using the common shared areas.

For more information, a copy of the Department of Health's Isolation Guide can be found [here](#).

Are residents required to disclose to the Strata Community if they are self-quarantined or infected?

At this stage it is unknown if the Health Department intends to notify a Strata Community if it has issued a notice to a person to quarantine.

However, SCA recommends all residents and their visitors undertake best practice to provide a duty not cause a hazard or interfere with quiet enjoyment. The body corporate has an obligation to maintain common property.

Recommendation 1: Health, safety and security of lot owners, occupiers of lots and others

A lot owner or occupier must not use the lot, or permit it to be used, so as to cause a hazard to the health, safety and security of an owner, occupier, or user of another lot.

Recommendation 2: Behaviour of owners, occupiers and invitees on common property

An owner or occupier of a lot must take all reasonable steps to ensure that guests of the owner or occupier do not behave in a manner likely to unreasonably interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of any other person entitled to use the common property.

Should I disclose to the Strata Community that I am self-isolating and/or have been ordered to self-isolate?

No. Self-isolation itself is for your own protection. (For confirmed cases, please see next question).

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Should I disclose to the Strata Community that I have been infected with COVID-19?

Yes, you should disclose to your body corporate manager if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Your identity and specific location will be kept confidential, but it does allow the Committee to notify any of the service contractors who may be impacted by your circumstance and give them opportunity to manage their own Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) as required. For example, they may be the waste management providers removing your rubbish for you or the Building Manager delivering your mail.

In addition, there are duties under the Workplace Health & Safety Act for which a Strata Community is responsible with respect to the common property and contractors that service the building. As all lot owners share the common property as tenants in common, those duties for disclosure, will extend to you as an owner or you as a landlord.

What type of Policies may the Committee create?

The Committee is responsible for the management of the common areas and facilities and may need to create additional policies to manage the COVID-19 crisis. These new policies may include:

1. **Delivery of parcels to your unit** – you may be required to instruct the courier to leave the parcel at the front of your apartment door, not in the lobby area. You will need to arrange how they get access to your floor etc.
2. **Visitors and visitors parking** – to manage the risk of exposure to other residents the committee may recommend restriction on the number of social visitors in line with government protocols, but certainly the visitor's carparks will be restricted for use by essential services like Doctors and medical services as a priority etc.
3. **Rubbish/waste** – you may be asked not to use the chute or rubbish room and to double bag the rubbish from your bin. Alternate collection methods may need to be implemented while you are house bound.
4. **Mail** – the committee may require you to make alternate arrangements for the delivery of mail.
5. **Shared facilities** – the committee may determine new access times (hours of operation and closure) of shared community facilities such as pools and gyms or shut them completely.
6. **Shared laundry facilities** – restricted use and/or closure of facilities may extend to communal laundries if residents do not adhere to the Government guidelines. Residents should be encouraged to take protective measures such as wearing gloves, washing their hands, not touching their face and disinfecting all surfaces of the

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machines they use. Maintain social distancing. Recommend use of the hot water setting and use of laundry detergents that contain a bleach compound. (Include advice to take into account the material being washed so clothes are not damaged).

7. **Meeting & Communication** – the committee may implement new meeting and communication protocols to minimise the potential spread of the virus and enable decisions of the Strata Community to continue to be made by an alternate means; *eg teleconference, on-line meetings, ballots.*
8. **Building Maintenance & Services** – the committee may determine to increase or reduce services to the building to minimise risks to residents; *eg increase cleaning regime, increase waste collection if all residents are staying home and the rubbish generated increases, employ security guards if there is a power failure and the entry/exit security systems stops working or garage doors etc.*

What if I have pets?

Although our pets aren't getting sick, Covid-19 is changing the lives of pets especially for dogs living in apartments.

Under quarantine or self-isolating, dogs in apartments are going to need to do their business inside and if you use your balcony or shower for this, please "scoop the poop" and not wash it down the drain system and after toileting disinfect the area.

Make sure you keep up all the flea treatments as well. You don't need a flea outbreak at this time within the building.

When you become anxious or things change, you might see an uptick in depressive behaviour like trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, not wanting to play or seeming listless. Other dogs might also become more destructive and anxious, exhibiting behaviour like increased reactivity, increased barking or difficulty settling. Try to set up a routine within your apartment and stick to it.

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Financial Difficulties

Support Funding is available:

[Major banks to offer \\$250,000 loans to small Australian businesses](#)

From 23 March 2020, Australia's major banks will start offering \$250,000 loans to small and medium sized businesses, where no repayments will be required for six months. The unsecured loans are 50 per cent guaranteed by the Federal Government and no interest will be charged unless the money is actually used. The Commonwealth Bank is rolling out \$10 billion of the special loans to help keep businesses afloat until reaching "the other side" of the crisis.

[Australian jobseekers to get \\$550 payment increase as part of huge coronavirus welfare package](#)

The Australian Government has announced more payments and streamlined claims for job seekers affected by coronavirus.

Subject to legislation passing, they'll:

- pay a temporary fortnightly \$550 Coronavirus Supplement from 27 April 2020 if you're getting an eligible payment
- extend eligibility for the first \$750 Economic Support Payment to pay it from 31 March 2020 if you're getting an eligible payment on any day from 12 March to 13 April 2020
- expand eligibility for some payments and make them easier to claim
- make Crisis Payment available if you need to self-isolate, are in severe financial hardship and you can get an income support payment
- pay a second \$750 Economic Support Payment from 13 July 2020 if you're getting an eligible payment or have an eligible concession card on 10 July 2020.

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Template: Communications to Residents

In times such as these, effective and timely communication within the community can help to provide comfort to residents that the Committee (and management) are giving these matters proper attention.

Committees can consider sending an initial notice to residents along the following lines:

Your Committee (and management) is making every effort to stay apprised of the ongoing evolution of the coronavirus situation in the local community, and its potential impact on where we live.

Currently there is no requirement for a person self-isolating to report their circumstances to the Strata Community (Committee or Strata Community Manager). This may put others living in the complex at greater risk. If the Committee (and management) are advised we can take all reasonable precautions in relation to maintenance, cleaning and sanitization of the common property to reduce the risk of infection on the premises to all residents. We therefore request that if you are a person at risk or have tested positive that you inform the Committee (and management). We will make every effort to keep residents apprised of all developments, of which we become aware, which may impact our community.

As our community moves to lockdown, our buildings will be at capacity. Our buildings include all age groups, and everyone will be home for some weeks. During this time, we need to be tolerant, considerate of others and kind to each other.

We repeat the concerns and recommendations that have been expressed by so many other organisations to avoid the spread and/or contracting the virus:

- *Be sure to frequently and thoroughly wash your hands.*
- *Where possible practice social distancing.*
- *Avoid handshakes. Elbow and forearm “bumps”, when desired, are a better idea.*
- *If you aren’t feeling well, please stay home.*

To assist us further in our communal living environment, remember also to:

- *Manage rubbish so we can maintain a high standard of cleanliness at our property for all, rubbish chutes/rooms/bins.*
- *Use gloves when accessing common entry door handles, lift buttons, etc.*
- *Flush only toilet paper down the toilet. Flushing anything other than toilet paper down the toilet, will only result in blockages impacting your home individually before it extends potentially to all in the property.*

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- *Be mindful of your pets. Although our pets aren't getting sick, Covid-19 is changing the lives of pets especially for dogs living in apartments.*

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The Committee may conduct a survey of residents to better understand if our neighbours are, in an at-risk category, if they live alone and what support services they have in place. Having this information will help us, your Committee, to better direct resources to areas where they are needed the most. Please respond, any information we receive will be kept private and confidential.

The Committee will also be considering what all of this means for upcoming meetings of the owners and will send out a notice about those issues in advance of any potential meetings.

END

As events in the community unfold, and particularly as meetings of owners arise, ongoing situation specific messaging, will assist in providing owners and residents with some comfort that the Strata Community is actively engaged in taking all reasonable steps to deal with this evolving situation.

We also recommend that you add to your communications how residents can contact you and your Strata Management firm for further information.

Some bodies corporate may consider:

- reminding all residents, workers and guests of the importance of practising appropriate hygiene (e.g. handwashing) and social distancing
- asking residents diagnosed with COVID-19 to alert the body corporate so other residents can be informed and take appropriate precautions. You need to balance the requirement for reducing others' exposure with the individual's right to privacy

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So, what does this mean for you as the Committee?

The Committee is the designated representative of all the owners (and by default residents) that live in your development. You are responsible for the health and safety of your residents on behalf of the body corporate.

At this stage there is very little published by the Health Departments as to any specific obligations a building owner has when providing shelter to a person with or suspected to have COVID-19. However, the Government has introduced new containment measures for social distancing as well as for non-essential services that includes pools and gyms. Committees should now close all pools and gyms within schemes.

Together with your Strata Manager and your Building Manager, the Committee should develop its own, customised, Pandemic Management Plan. To do this you will need to:

- Map your dependencies to understand where disruptions might impact your development. For example, greater parcel delivery, more visitors and impact of financial reserves.
- Review the preparedness of your critical third parties (Fire, Pool, Cleaning, Waste removal etc.) as these services may be affected.
- Create a communication platform to inform residents. This could be as simple as a daily or weekly bulletin in the lobby or using technology platforms.
- List the common areas most at risk for contamination and put in a management strategy for each area (e.g. facilities, door handles, bins, air conditioning, elevators, plumbing issues, committee meetings, meeting rooms etc)

The Committee will remain responsible for management of contractors visiting the site, however you are advised to not directly approach contractors. If you have a Strata Manager they will continue to organise your Contractors via official work orders. It may be necessary to delay non-essential work/activities on-site, however this will be done in consultation with the Committee as and when required.

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Resources

- Queensland Health: 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- National Coronavirus Health Information Line: 1800 020 080
- [Queensland Health: COVID-19 information](#)
- [Australian Government, Department of Health: COVID-19 information](#)
- [Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
- [Code of Practice: Managing the work environment and facilities](#)
- [Smartraveller website](#)
- [World Health Organisation](#)

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