

Apartment Living and COVID-19 for Residents

Introduction

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 restrict the use or 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.

Find information on social distancing here:
<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-social-distancing.pdf>

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 Strata Community 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.

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

Yes, you should disclose to your strata community 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 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.

SCA Ltd wish to acknowledge and thank SCA (VIC) for their contribution in the development of this best practice guideline.

This publication is only a guide. Readers should make and rely on their own expert enquiries. No warranty is given about the accuracy of the material and no liability for negligence or otherwise is assumed by SCA, its servants or agents in any way connected with this publication.

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[Please visit Government Websites for regular updates.](#)

Government Information – Useful Links

COVID-19 Government Updates

These sites will link you to the latest Coronavirus news, updates and advice from government agencies

Australian Government

<https://www.australia.gov.au/>

Find out what actions your local community, employers and organisations can take to help reduce the risk of infection

WA

<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/coronavirus-covid-19>

What you need to know about coronavirus (COVID-19)

Find out what you need to know about the coronavirus [here](#).

- [What is COVID-19](#)
- [Symptoms](#)
- [How to seek medical attention](#)
- [Testing](#)
- [Self-isolation \(self-quarantine\)](#)
- [Protect yourself and others](#)
- [Social distancing](#)
- [Who is most at risk](#)
- [How it spreads](#)
- [Resources](#)