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# Beyond COVID-19: Physical inspections for residential properties during COVID-19 (Wales)

Version 4



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# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to enable RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms to deliver services to clients safely, consistently and in line with **Welsh government guidelines**.

It is critical that before any inspections are undertaken, RICS professionals and regulated firms consider and assess the most up to date government guidance.

RICS professionals and regulated firms delivering services to clients in Wales are reminded of the following recently published government and industry documents:

- The Welsh government announced relaxation on restrictions on housing moves and has issued advice on **moving home during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak**.
- Since 22 June 2020, surveyors have been permitted to visit domestic properties to carry out physical inspections. There are no restrictions on the type of survey that can be undertaken, but inspections should take place by appointment only, with only one person visiting the property at any time where feasible.
- RICS professionals and regulated firms must follow the **government's advice on social distancing, face coverings and COVID-19**, and other relevant guidance including Public Health Wales and **workplace guidance for employers and employees: COVID-19**.
- RICS professionals must take all reasonable measures in line with **Welsh government guidance** to ensure that social distancing and other appropriate safety measures are maintained at all times when working in other people's households.
- RICS, alongside UK residential property professional organisations and trade bodies, has been working collaboratively with government to support a safe reopening of the home moving market while ensuring the safety of everyone involved in it. On 13 May 2020, RICS collectively published **pan-industry practical recommendations** for professionals and consumers.

This document builds on government guidelines and focuses on physical inspections where RICS professionals need to come into contact with people and enter private residential properties to undertake any activity required for the rental or sale of that property.

Surveyors are able to visit properties to carry out the inspections and undertake any additional surveys (this includes inspections for all valuation purposes) that may be required, in accordance with government and Public Health Wales **social distancing guidelines**. As of 27 July 2020, physical house viewings can now occur at both occupied and unoccupied properties.

The Welsh government has adopted five principles for workplace safety, with full details in **Keep Wales safe at work**. Surveyors should follow government guidance for professionals at work in other people's homes. Physical inspections should be carried out in line with **workplace guidance for employers and employees: COVID-19**.

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RICS professionals and staff in RICS regulated firms need to ensure they continue to provide the highest levels of service while maintaining current social distancing guidelines and that they comply with public health guidance guidelines.

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms must ensure that the risk assessment for the business addresses the risks around COVID-19. Businesses should keep all risk mitigation measures under regular review. Further information is available from the **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)**.

If it is not possible to inspect the property safely to the extent required to provide an opinion of value and/or condition on a restricted basis, it may be necessary to decline the instruction. If the instruction is accepted, any restrictions to the inspection need to be recorded, agreed where appropriate and highlighted in the report. Where possible, a disclaimer should be included in both the terms and conditions and the report relating to any errors or omissions in the report caused by any inability to inspect relevant areas.

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms should always consider their safety and the wellbeing of their employees in their decision-making process. It is more important than ever to ensure workers are treated fairly.

**As the situation and guidance in this area is constantly evolving, RICS will update this information as and when appropriate.**

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## 2 Recommendations before the inspection

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms should:

- act in a transparent and professional manner with all parties involved
- be clear with the client/occupier about their service and any restrictions to the service as a result of COVID-19 and **social distancing guidelines** from the Welsh government
- ensure that the obligations in relation to client/consumer confidentiality and GDPR-compliant safe storage of client/consumer information continue to apply, even though some or all staff may be working remotely
- avoid physical contact with clients and contact clients/consumers by email, video conferencing platforms, or telephone
- when liaising with other property professionals avoid physical contact and adhere to current social distancing measures at all times
- minimise physical contact during key handovers when possible and ensure keys are sanitised at each handover
- RICS professionals should not enter a property where a member of the household is showing symptoms of COVID-19 or self-isolating. When organising an inspection of the subject property, check with clients/occupiers whether anyone is either in an at-risk category, **vulnerable group, shielding**, has or has had COVID-19 symptoms, has not yet completed the required period of household **self-isolation** or is awaiting test results. Note that this is likely to be sensitive health-related data and must be collected and stored in accordance with data protection legislation. RICS has produced guidance for RICS professionals and regulated firms on **data protection and reopening the property market**
- inspections should take place by appointment only, with one person visiting the property at any time
- secure as much information as possible from the client and/or occupier prior to the visit and as part of the pre-inspection research, including property use, occupancy, location, potential risk to occupants and any other relevant information required for the subject property and instruction; this includes carrying out a pre-inspection risk assessment with the occupier/client
- take all reasonable steps to ensure the client and property occupier is provided with as much information as possible about the visits, service and areas of the property that will be inspected in advance and ensure the inspection, service and arrangements are agreed by all parties prior to the physical inspection
- sanitise equipment in line with current public health guidance, periodically and as often as practical

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- ask occupiers to prepare for the inspection and share the following recommendations. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list:
  - occupiers should either vacate the property or seek to minimise contact with surveyor
  - pets to be contained in one room or, if not possible, to be kept at a distance to be kept at a distance in line with physical distancing guidelines
  - when people/families are in occupation, they should maintain social distancing in line with government guidelines
  - ask the client/occupier to ensure you have access to all the parts of the property you need to inspect and ensure all areas are open or easily accessible (e.g. cellars, lofts, doors and windows in the case of a home survey) to reduce contact with surfaces as much as possible
  - ask occupiers to ensure surfaces have been cleaned with household cleaning products in line with public health advice
  - ask the occupier to ensure that the property is well ventilated in advance of and during the inspection
  - advise client/occupier the property will be left as presented/found at arrival.
- examples of pre-inspection health-related questions for clients/occupiers are:
  - are you in an at-risk category as outlined by the government?
  - are you or is anyone in your household symptomatic?
  - have you or anyone in the household tested positive?
  - have you or anyone in your household been self-isolating in accordance with government guidelines?
  - are you able to leave the property for the duration of internal inspection?

More advice can be found within Welsh government [guidance on moving home](#) and pan-industry guidance on [reopening the home moving market safely](#).

It would also help to ask the occupier, when appropriate, to advise the RICS professional or RICS regulated firm member of staff the questions below.

### Access

- Where is the electric meter located in the property? The RICS professional will require access.
- Where is the gas meter located? The RICS professional will require access.
- Where is the water meter located? The RICS professional will require access.
- Where is the stopcock located?
- Where is the boiler located?
- Where is the cold-water storage tank located (if applicable)?
- Where is the hot water cylinder located (if applicable)?
- Are there any inaccessible areas?

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**Documentation**

- Do you have any certification regarding gas and electricity safety?
- Do you have any guarantees or warranties for windows, boilers, historical damp or rot treatment, extensions?
- Do you have any documentation in respect of building warrants or planning consents relating to extensions or other improvements?
- To minimise physical contact, can you share any relevant documents electronically?

**General**

- Is the property occupied?
- What is the current and future use of the property?
- Are you aware of any issues in the property? If yes, please specify where.
- What is the broadband service and where is the connection point (if applicable)?

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## 3 Recommendations during the inspection

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms should:

- consider health and safety aspects and any relevant **current government advice** in relation to travelling to the property, accessing the property, carrying out an inspection and delivering the service
- request that occupiers not be in the property if possible, in order to avoid physical contact and ensure compliance to existing social distancing measures. Consumer recommendations are highlighted in **recent Welsh government guidance**
- adhere to Welsh government guidelines on cleaning hands thoroughly prior to and upon leaving the property
- only take the equipment and tools actually required for the inspection to the property, according to the service delivered
- where the occupier has to be present, request that they follow the government social distancing guidelines
- comply with government requirements on face coverings when inspecting occupied properties
- aim for as minimal an amount of contact with surfaces when inspecting elements of the property as possible
- ensure you keep a record of inspection using appropriate recording equipment, including any limitations of the inspection as a result of restrictions
- ensure you take an adequate number of photographs/videos. These can be especially helpful for restricted/inaccessible areas.

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## 4 Recommendations after the inspection

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms should:

- wash/sanitise their hands thoroughly and sanitise their equipment
- appropriately dispose of any disposable PPE used during inspection in line with government guidelines
- communicate the outcome/findings of the inspection appropriately with the client as per the instruction and agreed terms of engagement
- deliver reports in line with current RICS standards and guidance
- ensure that any restrictions of information/advice/areas which weren't inspected due to public health limitations are made clear and stated in report(s)
- note any limitations to inspection/service delivered as a result of current social distancing measures and health and safety risks, and where possible, include a disclaimer relating to any errors or omissions arising from any limitations to the inspection or service delivered
- highlight any risks and hazards found during the inspection with the client, depending on the advice being given.

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## 5 Professional accountability and responsibility

RICS professionals and RICS regulated firms are expected to behave ethically and professionally, while taking adequate steps to consider health and safety at all times for all parties involved.

The Welsh government has adopted five principles for workplace safety, with full details in **Keep Wales safe at work**. Surveyors should follow government guidance for professionals at work in other people's homes.

All businesses should follow the government's latest **guidance for employers and businesses** on how to work safely during the coronavirus pandemic and the guidance on how to work safely in other people's homes.

It is important that all businesses work together to **Test, Trace, Protect** to minimise the spread of infection and the Welsh government expects all sectors to consider how they can operate in a way which minimises the need for face to face contact, and where that can't be avoided, adopt procedures that ensure social distancing.

No work should be carried out by a person who has COVID-19 symptoms, however mild, or by anyone who has been asked to self-isolate.

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