

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Revised October 14, 2020

Safe Start Proclamation

What is the Safe Start Proclamation? *(Revised June 19, 2020)*

Effective June 1st, Governor Inslee issued the statewide "Safe Start Proclamation" (the "Proclamation") to safely facilitate the phased re-opening of Washington's businesses and recreation. The Proclamation takes effect as the prior Stay Home, Stay Healthy Order expires.

The Proclamation continues a phased approach to re-open business in Washington. There are different restrictions for real estate activities in counties that are in Phase 1, modified Phase 1 (or Phase 1.5), Phase 2, and Phase 3. Guidance for Phase 4 has not yet been issued.

Counties will be admitted into different phases by the Governor based on health data and other criteria. The list of counties moving to different phases is fluid and will continue to change. Some counties will be in Phase 1, other counties may be in Phase 1.5, some counties will be in Phase 2, select counties will be admitted to Phase 3, and eventually Phase 4.

The latest information about county approvals is available on the [Washington State Coronavirus Response website](#) and a map is available [here](#).

Brokers must adhere to the "phase" protocols for the county where the property is located, regardless of the location of the broker's office or home.

What are the required protocols for any permitted in-person activity during Phase 2 and Phase 3? *(Revised October 14, 2020)*

The protocols that must be followed for permitted in-person activities (previews, showings, listing appointments, inspections, walk-throughs, appraisals, etc.), during Phase 2 and Phase 3 include:

- In-person activities must be by appointment only;
- Face coverings are required to be worn at all times by real estate brokers, their clients, and industry partners (e.g. appraisers, inspectors, photographers, stagers, etc.). Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering;
- No more than five (5) people, in addition to the broker, may be on site at any one time; and
- Those persons must strictly follow social distancing guidelines by remaining at least six feet apart at all times.

A broker may not leave a third party unattended in a property. Accordingly, brokers may only bring five other persons at a time into the property.

Please summarize the permitted real estate activities and related restrictions that apply to Phase 2 and Phase 3. (Revised October 14, 2020)

<u>Activity/Requirement</u>	<u>Phase 2</u>	<u>Phase 3</u>
In-person brokerage activities on site at the property	Permitted by appointment with no more than <u>five (5)</u> people, in addition to the broker, on site with strict social distancing.	
Face Coverings	Required for brokers, clients and industry partners for all in-person activities. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering.	
Open Houses	Permitted with no more than <u>five (5)</u> people, in addition to the broker, in the property with strict social distancing and proper sanitation measures.	Permitted with no more than <u>ten (10)</u> people, in addition to the broker, in the property with strict social distancing and proper sanitation measures.
Limited Real Estate Firm Office Re-Opening	Permitted if the required protocols are followed.	
Third party sign-installers	Permitted, assuming phase protocols are followed.	
Stagers and Photographers	Permitted, assuming phase protocols are followed.	
Movers	Permitted, with the fewest people possible, following social distancing and sanitation measures.	
Property Management	Permitted, assuming phase protocols are followed.	
Contractor Repairs	Contractor activities are regulated separately – check with contractor about protocols/safety measures.	
Lenders, Title, and Escrow	Permitted. The “Financial Services Sector” is deemed essential.	
Counties	Adams, Benton, Chelan, Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Douglas, Franklin, Grant, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Klickitat, Okanogan, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Spokane, Walla Walla, Whatcom, Yakima	Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Grays Harbor, Island, Kittitas, Lewis, Lincoln, Mason, Pacific, Pend Oreille, Skamania, Stevens, Thurston, Wahkiakum, Whitman

Are Open Houses allowed during Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes – limited open houses are permitted, provided that measures are taken by the broker to ensure occupancy is restricted to the gathering size permitted by the current county phase and all other required protocols are followed (face coverings, social distancing, sanitation, etc.)

For Phase 2 counties - no more than five (5) people, in addition to the broker, may be in the property at any one time. For Phase 3 counties - no more than ten (10) people, in addition to the broker, may be in the property at any one time.

Brokers must strictly adhere to the occupancy restrictions for open houses. Firms should develop processes that brokers follow to ensure compliance, including the following:

- Post signs at the property (e.g. on the open house signs, at the front door, inside the property etc.) alerting the public to the occupancy restriction and reminding the public to wear face coverings and social distance.
- Brokers need to carefully monitor the number of persons on site at any one time and not admit more than the allowed number of persons into the property.
- Brokers need to constantly monitor the front door and potentially lock the door from time to time to prohibit additional persons from entering.
- Firms may consider assigning two brokers to an open house – one to stand outside and monitor the number of persons admitted to the property, and the other to be inside the property.
- Brokers must enforce the face covering requirement.
- Persons waiting to enter the property must social distance and wear face coverings.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces, before and after the open house, and have sanitizer placed around the property.
- Because contact tracing in the event of an outbreak is important, brokers should maintain a sign-in sheet that includes contact information for all attending an open house.
- Please keep in mind that the firm and broker hosting an open house are at risk of criminal and civil liability for failure to fully comply with the required protocols.

What in-person real estate brokerage services are permissible in Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Provided the required protocols are followed for any permitted in-person activity, residential and commercial real estate brokers may:

- Conduct listing presentations, take photos, and create virtual tours for new listings;
- Facilitate signing of contract documents;
- Preview and show listings by appointment only; and
- Facilitate inspections, appraisals, buyer “walk-throughs,” and other activities typically required to complete a real estate sale or lease.
- Hold an open house, provided that strict social distancing is followed, proper sanitation measures are taken, and measures are taken by the broker to ensure occupancy is limited to the gathering size permitted by the current county phase.

Note that any broker who violates the Governor's Proclamation not only puts himself/herself and his/her family at great personal risk, but also puts the broker's real estate firm and his/her clients at risk. Any violation is a gross misdemeanor and a violation of the real estate license law (RCW 18.85).

Can real estate firms re-open their offices in Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes. Real estate firms can re-open offices located in a limited fashion, so long as the firm adheres to the many [required protocols](#), including requirements for [professional service offices](#).

Washington Realtors and Northwest MLS have developed resources that firms can use to safely re-open their offices in compliance with the required safety protocols. Of course, firms are not required to re-open and some may choose to delay re-opening until a later date. Firms may also choose to develop their own resources and plans to comply with the Governor's requirements.

The resources developed by Washington Realtors and Northwest MLS, available on their respective websites, include the following, all required by the Proclamation:

- COVID-19 Exposure Control, Mitigation, and Recovery Plan (required to be posted in the office)
- Entry door sign (required at the front door)
- Hygiene, sanitation, and related signs (required to be posted around the office)
- PowerPoint to assist with required training

What are some of the required protocols for re-opening a real estate office in Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

If a real estate firm chooses to re-open, designated brokers should carefully review the requirements to ensure compliance with all protocols. No office facilities may open for operations until they can meet and maintain all the requirements, including providing materials, schedules, and equipment required to comply. Some of the protocols are:

- Maintain minimum six-foot separation between all persons in all interactions at all times.
- Arrange furniture to encourage social distancing.
- Require clients/customers to make appointments for in-person services.
- Real estate brokers and their clients must wear cloth face coverings at all times. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves and face masks to employees and independent contractors.
- Ensure frequent and adequate hand washing with adequate maintenance of supplies. Use disposable gloves where applicable to prevent transmission on office supplies or other equipment that is shared.
- Establish a janitorial schedule that includes frequent cleaning and sanitizing with a particular emphasis on commonly touched surfaces.
- Screen individuals for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 before starting work. Make sure individuals who are sick stay home or immediately go home if they feel or appear sick. Cordon off any areas where an individual with probable or confirmed COVID-19 illness worked, touched surfaces, etc. until the area and equipment is cleaned and sanitized. Follow the [cleaning guidelines set by the CDC to deep clean and sanitize](#).
- Occupancy of the office will be capped at 50% of maximum capacity or lower for Phase 2 and Phase 3.

- All on-site employees and independent contractors must be trained on the worksite’s policies, these requirements and all relevant sanitization and social distancing protocols. They must also be trained about COVID-19 and how to prevent its transmission.
- A site-specific COVID-19 monitor shall be designated at each location to monitor the health of individuals and enforce the COVID-19 job site safety plan.
- Develop and post at each location a comprehensive COVID-19 exposure control, mitigation, and recovery plan. A copy of the plan must be available at the location and available for inspection by state and local authorities.
- COVID-19 safety information and requirements, such as CDC, DOH, OSHA posters and the employer-owner written policies for COVID-19, shall be visibly posted at each location.
- Authorized access to the business should primarily be through the front door.
- Face shields or sneeze guards should be placed throughout the worksite at all places of potential interaction between service providers and clients

Can brokers physically preview or show properties in Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes. In-person previews or showings of properties are permitted if the required protocols are followed. Previews or showings must be by appointment, a total of no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are permitted at the property at any one time, and those people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers and their clients must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. Any previews or showings should be conducted as expeditiously as possible.

Real estate brokers may not leave a third party unattended in a property. Accordingly, brokers may only bring five people at a time into the property. Sellers should vacate the property prior to any preview or showing appointment. In addition, listing brokers should stagger any preview or showing appointments to avoid any overlap.

In lieu of physically showing the property, brokers and buyers can utilize virtual tours and videos that are included with the listing. Brokers should also consider virtual showings to further practice social distancing.

Do brokers currently need to leave their business card when previewing or showing properties to comply with NWMLS Rule 180(a)? (April 1, 2020)

Not at this time. To eliminate surface touches and the potential spread of germs, brokers do not currently need to leave a business card in listings when previewing or showing properties. Brokers must register with the keybox, which records the broker’s entry into the property. Listing brokers can share keybox activity with sellers as frequently as practical and should make sure to “assign” the keybox to the listing. In addition, all previews and showings must be conducted by appointment, which provides sellers with prior notice of all entries into the property.

Can inspectors conduct inspections during Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes. If an inspection is required in a transaction, an inspection may be conducted, provided that it is by appointment, a total of no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at the property at any one time, and those people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers, their clients, and inspectors must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. The inspection should be conducted as expeditiously as possible.

A pre-inspection of a property prior to mutual acceptance of a purchase and sale agreement is permitted, provided that it is by appointment, a total of no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at the property at any one time, and those people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers, their clients, and inspectors must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. The pre-inspection should be conducted as expeditiously as possible.

Sellers should vacate the property prior to the inspection.

Can appraisers conduct in-person appraisals during Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes. If an appraisal is required in a pending transaction, an appraisal may be conducted, provided that it is by appointment, a total of no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at the property at any one time, and those five people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers, their clients, and appraisers must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. The appraisal should be conducted as expeditiously as possible. Sellers should vacate the property prior to the appraisal.

Can buyers' brokers conduct "buyer walk-throughs" prior to closing during Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes. If a walk-through is required in a pending transaction, a walk-through may be conducted, provided that it is by appointment, a total of no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at the property at any one time, and those people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers and their clients must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. The walk-through should be conducted as expeditiously as possible. Sellers should vacate the property prior to the walk-through.

Can brokers retrieve keys and provide to a buyer after a closed sale during Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes. If keys to the property are not otherwise available to a buyer at closing, a broker in the transaction may make arrangements to retrieve and deliver the keys to the buyer, provided that it is done so by appointment, a total of no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at the property or at the location of the key delivery, and those people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers and their clients must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering.

Can real estate brokers input new listings in the MLS system during Phase 2 and Phase 3? *(Revised October 14, 2020)*

Yes. Real estate brokers are permitted to input new listings into the MLS system. Real estate brokers may conduct listing presentations, take photos of the property, and create virtual tours for new listings, provided that those activities are done so by appointment, no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at the property at any one time, and those people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers and their clients must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. In addition, a seller may take pictures of his or her own property and send those photos to the listing broker.

Can professional photographers take photos and create virtual tours during Phase 2 and Phase 3? *(Revised October 14, 2020)*

Yes. Professional photography for listings is permitted. Like all other in-person activities, photos and virtual tours must be by appointment, no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at property at any one time, and those people must adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers, their clients, and photographers must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. Sellers should vacate the property prior to any photography activities. Note that creating virtual tours is an effective way to allow buyers to view the property without the need for an in-person showing.

Can stagers stage homes and remove furniture from a listing during Phase 2 and Phase 3? *(Revised October 14, 2020)*

Yes. Staging a home and removing staging items is permitted. Like all other in-person activities, staging activities must be by appointment, no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are at the property at any one time, and those people must adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers, their clients, and stagers must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering. Sellers should vacate the property prior to any staging activities.

Can moving companies move buyers and sellers? *(Revised May 19, 2020)*

Yes. Moving companies are permitted to operate so long as all moving work is conducted with the fewest employees possible, following social distancing and sanitation measures.

Can brokers hire signs installers during Phase 2 and Phase 3? *(Revised October 14, 2020)*

Yes. Brokers may hire sign installers, provided that no more than five people, in addition to the broker, are present at the sign installation and those people adhere to strict social distancing guidelines. Real estate brokers, their clients, and sign installers must wear cloth face coverings. Brokers may not provide services to any client who does not wear a face covering.

Can contractors make repairs associated with an inspection response? (Revised May 19, 2020)

Construction practices are permitted and regulated under a separate order from the Governor. Brokers should advise the client to consult with any contractor hired to complete repairs to ensure that the contractor is in compliance with all protocols required of the contractor.

Are property management services allowed in Phase 2 and Phase 3? (Revised October 14, 2020)

Yes. Residential and commercial property management is permitted, so long as all protocols required for real estate activities are followed. Note that throughout these FAQs, reference to “buyer” includes “tenant” and reference to “seller” includes “landlord”.

Can lenders, title, and escrow continue to operate? (March 26, 2020)

Yes. The “Financial Services Sector” was deemed essential. This includes workers who are needed to process and maintain systems for processing financing transactions and services and insurance companies including mortgage lenders, escrow and title insurers. Because the Financial Services Sector is considered essential, real estate transactions that are under contract may proceed to closing. Of course, there could be delays, which is why the parties should consider using the Force Majeure and Closing Addendum (Form 22FM).

What if my buyer or seller has questions about their rights and obligations under their purchase and sale agreement or lease? (Revised June 5, 2020)

As always, brokers have a duty to refer their clients to experts regarding matters in which the broker lacks expertise. Particularly in matters affected by COVID-19, the Stay Home, Stay Healthy Order, and the Safe Start Proclamation, it is unlikely that brokers will have expertise and should advise their clients to seek the advice of an attorney.

How do I stay up-to-date with matters affecting real estate brokerage and avoid being misled by false rumors? (March 26, 2020)

There are false rumors and misinformation being circulated. Many brokers have acted in reliance on bad information to their embarrassment and detriment.

Washington Realtors and NWMLS communicate frequently to keep members informed of any developments affecting the industry. Both Washington Realtors’ website and NWMLS’s websites will continue to offer the latest and most accurate information possible.