

The coronavirus crisis has hit many renters hard.

The Victorian government is urging landlords and agents to “be compassionate” with tenants affected by the pandemic, while also working to introduce support measures like a six-month moratorium for those in financial distress.

But Tenants Victoria says it’s still hearing stories “every day” of renters being evicted and “reminded that no tolerance will be shown for people who fall behind in the rent, even if they have lost their jobs because of coronavirus”.

The tenancy legal service has shared examples of the issues being reported to them by Victorian renters, prompting the *Herald Sun* to turn to Consumer Affairs Victoria for advice for those doing it tough.

What do I do if I’m unable to pay rent?

CAV is directing tenants in this situation to notify their landlord or agent “as early as possible” and ideally agree, in writing, with their landlord to a payment plan for rent arrears.

Several non-profits are also set up to help tenants in financial crisis. CAV recommends contacting the National Debt Helpline via ndh.org.au or 1800 007 007 for initial advice and referral to a financial counsellor. The [Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program](#) also supports financially-disadvantaged and vulnerable tenants.

What do I do if my landlord wants to evict me?

Case study: “(We’ve been) served with a 60-day notice to vacate. The date we are required to be out is May 12. With the likelihood of a lockdown period, ... are we in our right to ask for an extension?”

Non-payment of rent is typically a grounds for eviction. But the Victorian and Federal governments have confirmed a [six-month moratorium on evictions](#) for residential and commercial tenants in “financial distress” due to COVID-19.

Details including how the moratorium will work, when it will kick in and how landlords will be supported are yet to be communicated, with the Victorian government “currently working through the legislative changes needed to bring this into effect” and the National Cabinet agreeing to “consider advice from treasurers” at its next meeting this Friday, April 3.

In the meantime, the government is encouraging landlords and agents to “work with tenants facing lost income or employment” by coming up with alternative arrangements.

What do I do if I need to leave my rental due to lost employment or income caused by COVID-19, but I'm on a fixed-term agreement?

Tenants in this situation should contact their landlord first to attempt to negotiate an early end to their agreement, CAV says.

Should the landlord not agree, tenants can apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal based on severe hardship, which is covered by Section 234 of the Residential Tenancies Act.

Are my property manager and prospective buyers/tenants still able to physically inspect my property?

Case study: "I have health conditions that put me at risk if I catch COVID-19, but that hasn't stopped my landlord/agent from entering the property illegally without my permission, conducting weekly house inspections and finally evicting me, all during this crisis."

Yes, but open for inspections are banned, so prospective buyers and tenants must arrange private inspections of properties. Only two people are allowed inside a property at a time.

Digital inspections are becoming increasingly prominent and could help ease the anxiety outgoing tenants are feeling about having strangers in their homes. Owners listing properties for sale and rent with realestate.com.au can now add virtual tours for free. Industry Insider director Andrew Date said his business's property management arm was providing "video walk throughs" to prospective tenants. "I'm telling them to apply online first, then I'll send you the video and if you like what you see, we'll arrange a private viewing," he said. Auction streaming and bidding website Gavl is also working to roll out live-stream open for inspections.

As is always the case, landlords must give tenants 24 hours' written notice of entry, stating the reason for entry. They can enter between 8am to 6pm on any day except public holidays.

Agents are required to ensure compliance with this, and also practice "high levels of hygiene" themselves by making sure "high traffic areas" like handles on doors, cupboards and wardrobes, and stair rails, are clean and disinfected.

[Click here](#) for more information from Consumer Affairs Victoria.

[Click here](#) to contact Tenants Victoria