



## COVID-19: What Does It Mean for Tenants?

Info on COVID-19 and housing changes daily. Please come back to keep checking for updates. This info was last updated on April 15th.

### What do I need to know as a tenant?

- You must still pay rent
- Tenants' rights have not changed because of COVID-19
- Tenants' duties have not changed because of COVID-19
- Your landlord cannot lock you out of your place
- Your landlord cannot turn off your electricity or water
- If your landlord wants to evict you, they still must take you to court

### What if I can't pay rent?

You should try to pay your rent. Even though some landlords can't evict people right now, you still owe them rent money. If you don't pay your rent, these things could happen:

- You will eventually be evicted
- Your landlord can report that you aren't paying.
- This could hurt your credit score
- Your landlord could sue you for any rent money you didn't pay
- If your landlord wins in court, they could take money out of your paychecks

### Should I agree to pay my landlord back later?

Maybe. Right now, there are no laws that say rent will be canceled or forgiven. That means you owe rent even if your landlord can't evict you right away. If your landlord is willing to give you time to pay any rent you can't afford right now, that might be a good thing.

### What if I make an agreement with my landlord now?

Make sure your landlord agrees to follow new rules as they come out. For example, if the law says you don't have to pay back rent in the future, your landlord should go by the new law.

### What if my landlord locks me out or shuts off my utilities?

**This is illegal.** A landlord cannot force a tenant to move out without using the courts. If your landlord has locked you out of your place or turned off your utilities, call Legal Aid for help.



### How soon can I be evicted for not paying my rent?

It depends. Courts are closed for nonpayment of rent cases until at least May 1st. **Your landlord cannot evict you until the courts re-open.**

Some landlords are not allowed to evict tenants for not paying rent until July 25th. These are some of the landlords that can't evict tenants for not paying rent for the until July 25th:

- Public housing
- Project-based Section 8 housing
- Low Income Housing Tax Credit housing
- Rural Development housing
- Landlords with a federally-backed mortgage loan

### What happens after July 25th? Can I be evicted then?

**Yes. Your landlord can start the process to evict you.** Under the new law, here are the steps your landlord has to follow to evict you.

- You don't pay rent
- It passes July 25th
- Your landlord must give you 30 days' notice that they plan to evict you
- After those 30 days are up, your landlord can file a paper to have you evicted. That paper is called a "detainer warrant" or "detainer summons"
- Someone will "serve" you with this paper. You are served when someone hands you the papers or they tape the paper to the door of your place
- The detainer warrant will give you a court date
- At your court date, the judge will decide if you get to stay or must move
- If the judge says you must move, the judge will give you ten more days to move
- If you are not out by the end of those ten days, your landlord can ask the Sheriff to come force you out



### Can I still be evicted for other things?

Yes. Tenants CAN still be evicted if they break the lease another way. You should still follow all state laws and rules from your lease. Just because there is a pandemic, you do not have the right to break the rules in your lease. Want to know what your duties are as a tenant? [Click here for more information.](#)

### How soon can I be evicted for breaking my lease for something OTHER than not paying rent?

We don't know. Courts are not having in-person cases for evictions right now. Some judges may start doing video hearings for evictions soon. If they do, then you can be evicted sooner.

### Can my landlord charge me late fees?

Maybe. Some landlords are not allowed to charge late fees until July 25th. These are some of the landlords that can't charge late fees until July 25th:

- Public housing
- Project-based Section 8 housing
- Low Income Housing Tax Credit housing
- Rural Development housing
- Landlords with a federally-backed mortgage loan

If you want to know if your landlord can charge you late fees, you can visit one of our legal clinics. Visit [LAS.org/phone-clinics](https://LAS.org/phone-clinics) for a list of our upcoming legal clinics.

### Can I break my lease and move if I can't afford the rent?

If you don't have a written lease agreement, you have an oral lease agreement. If you pay your rent monthly, then you have a month-to-month lease. Your landlord can end your lease by giving you written notice thirty days before they want to end your lease.

If you pay your rent weekly, then you have a week-to-week lease agreement. Your landlord can end your lease by giving you written notice ten days before they want to end your lease.

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### Can my landlord refuse to re-sign my lease for another year?

It depends. Most landlords do not have to re-sign your lease for another year. That is still true with COVID-19.

If you live in one of these places, your landlord DOES have to re-sign your lease unless they have a good reason why they don't want you living there. Here are the places that must re-sign your lease unless they have a good reason to kick you out:

- Public housing
- Project-based Section 8 housing
- Low Income Housing Tax Credit housing
- Rural Development housing

### What if my rent price is based on my income?

If you live in public or income-based housing, you should tell your landlord immediately if you lose your job or work fewer hours. You should immediately report any loss of income to your landlord. Tell your landlord about the income drop in writing. Keep a copy of whatever you give your landlord so you can prove you gave it to them. If you live in a tax credit property, your rent may not change.

### I can't afford my rent. Is there a place I can look for more affordable housing?

These are some websites where you can look for affordable housing. These places charge you rent based on your income.

1. [The Department of Housing and Urban Development's website](#)

2. [TNHousingSearch.org](#) – Website by the TN Housing Development Agency

### What are my rights and duties as a renter?

These booklets say what rights and duties you have as a renter in Tennessee. If you live in Anderson, Blount, Bradley, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Madison, Maury, Montgomery, Rutherford, Sevier, Shelby, Sullivan, Sumner, Washington, Williamson or Wilson counties, read this booklet:

- [Renter's Rights \(URLTA\)](#)
- [Renter's Rights \(URLTA\) Spanish](#)
- If you live in any other Tennessee county, read this one: [Rural Renter's Rights](#)