

Rethinking “Open Houses” During the Pandemic

Real estate professionals need to rethink their practices to protect themselves, consumers and communities from COVID-19.

It’s not business as usual.

BC’s Restart Plan takes a phased approach to reopening our province’s economy. It allows business activities to gradually resume when the time is right, with protocols and guidance to do so safely. When it comes to real estate showings and open houses, in particular, that means doing things differently than you have in the past.

By using the 10 best practices outlined below you can help ensure that you’ve assessed, prepared for, and prevented potential health risks to yourself, your clients, and consumers.

1. Consider Your Clients’ Best Interests

When you offer or you are asked by a client to host an open house as part of marketing their property, it’s important to discuss all the different risk factors (from the spread of COVID-19 to concerns from neighbours or tenants), as well as the precautions you will take to reduce such risks. Holding an open house may risk exposing you, your clients, attendees, and others to COVID-19. These risks can differ depending on whether a home is vacant, owner-occupied, tenant occupied or a strata unit in a multi-tenanted building.

Only after assessing the risks and understanding the required precautions can your clients make an informed decision to hold an open house. If the decision is made to proceed, make sure you document your clients’ agreement with your precautions, as well as any responsibilities they have agreed to before and after an open house.

Communicate the protocols you will be following to your clients and ensure they understand and agree to their role in sanitizing the property.

Remember, the brokerage determines the services they offer to clients. If it’s not in the Schedule “A”, you are not obligated to provide those services. If it is in the Schedule “A” and you

are concerned with the risks, you should discuss this with your client and your managing broker.

2. Understand the Safety Protocols to Follow

Make sure you have a good understanding of the most up-to-date safety guidelines and protocols from the [Provincial Health Office](#) and [WorkSafeBC](#), as well as your brokerage's policies and procedures. These orders, guidelines and protocols will be the foundation for the protocols that you must develop and put in place before you resume holding open houses. These guidelines may change, for example, if BC experiences a second wave of COVID-19 cases, so it's important to monitor the situation as it evolves.

You can view the [Checklist for Managing Brokers here](#).

3. Leverage Technology to Reduce In-person Interactions

The provincial government has emphasized that we must keep our in-person interactions to no more than 65% of pre-COVID-19 interactions. This means taking every opportunity to use technology to reduce in-person contact (e.g., virtual showings and executing documents remotely).

Every part of our province has been impacted by COVID-19. Real estate professionals throughout BC must remain alert and vigilant to the ongoing risk of transmitting COVID-19. Let your clients know that you can provide real estate services and market their home effectively using the array of technological tools available. Virtual showings and transactions are an impactful way to protect communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Use Your Professional Judgement

Some of the safety guidelines and protocols issued by the health authorities require you to use your professional judgement.

One thing is certain, if you, your clients, or any consumer are displaying symptoms related to COVID-19, you cannot proceed in a way that may endanger others. You are obligated to refuse entry to the consumer, reschedule if the seller or tenant is displaying symptoms, or find someone to host on your behalf if you are showing symptoms.

In some cases, it may not be possible to proceed with an open house altogether.

5. Anticipate and Respond to Community Concerns

You may hear concerns from others in the neighbourhoods and strata properties where you host open houses. Whether online or in-person, be prepared to respond to concerns with professionalism and empathy. Remember Dr. Bonnie Henry's words, "Be kind, be calm, be safe." By communicating clearly about the precautions and safety protocols you are following, you can help members of the public understand that you are acting responsibly to protect their health and safety. Keep in mind that your actions can influence the public's perception of the entire real estate profession.

6. Limit Attendance and Manage Consumer Expectations

Try to limit open house attendees to serious buyers by leveraging technology first, and screening* for qualifying consumers who:

- have already listed or sold their current home,
- are working with a REALTOR®,
- are prequalified for financing,
- have already viewed the property online through videos, 3-D renderings, etc., and
- have already viewed the neighbourhood.

Whenever possible, encourage pre-registration* and/or a schedule for open houses. Ask consumers to do the following before considering attending an open house:

- review the MLS® listing details/photos in full,
- review any floor plans, 3D renderings, videos or additional information,
- drive by and be familiar with the physical location of the property,
- ensure they are prequalified,
- bring their own masks and other personal protective equipment as required, and
- review the open house safety procedures, as provided by the open house host.

**Keep in mind that by screening consumers and scheduling appointments, you can no longer rely on the open house exemption from the requirement to make agency disclosures. Provide the Disclosure of Representation in Trading Services form and, as appropriate, the Disclosure of Risks to Unrepresented Parties form (available on [WEBForms®](#)) to consumers before providing any trading services.*

It is recommended that you post the open house safety protocols you develop on your website, share them on social media, include a link to them on MLS® listings so consumers know what to expect, and have them available at the open house.

Consider sign toppers on open house signs stating that open house safety protocols are in effect and a “take-one box” explaining the protocols.

Also consider using the CREA Coronavirus Statement & Consent form, available on WEBForms®, or your brokerage’s waiver form.

7. Plan in Advance

- Prepare the personal protective equipment you will need for yourself and any that you intend to provide to attendees.
- Require anyone entering the home to wear a mask, including other real estate professionals. Consider how you will communicate this to consumers ahead of the open house, and what you will do if a consumer refuses to wear a mask or doesn’t have one. Consider having disposable masks available at every open house for this eventuality.
- Consider what cleaning protocols you may need to do during the open house and whether you will need extra time to ensure it is done.
- Consider if you will need assistance to manage physical distancing outside and inside the home.
- Use signage asking consumers:
 - not to enter if they have any COVID-19 symptoms, have been exposed to COVID-19 or have travelled outside of the province or country within the last 14 days,
 - to wash or sanitize their hands prior to entering the home,
 - to avoid using the washroom(s) in the home,
 - to wear masks in the home and in common areas for multi-tenanted properties, and
 - to observe physical distancing.

Some examples can be found here:

- [Physical distancing signage](#)
- [Personal hygiene etiquette](#) (WorkSafeBC)

- Plan and direct safe traffic flow in the open house to ensure physical distancing is maintained and possible. Consider:
 - if there is an opportunity to provide an alternate exit to the entrance,
 - if there are barriers to rooms, and
 - taping the floor and/or posting signage informing consumers of the traffic flow through the home.

8. Keep Safety in Mind During the Open House

- Confirm with the seller that the home has been [cleaned and that common spaces are disinfected](#). This should include door handles, counters, light switches or anywhere someone may touch.
- Provide hand sanitizer/disinfectant at the door and recommend that everyone use it.
- Keep a list of everyone who has attended the property in case contact tracing becomes necessary. Make sure they are aware of how their personal information is being collected/used and disclosed.
- Abide by the schedule you have in place and encourage consumers to wait in their car or line up outside while keeping two metres away from other waiting consumers.
- If possible, set out markers or barriers to help ensure two metre's distance is kept between consumers.
- Ensure that all lights are on, all doors are open (including closets) and all areas a consumer may want to see are accessible.
- Limit the number of individuals allowed into a home at one time based on the size of the property. Have a plan to communicate this to consumers, and ensure they wait until they are invited to enter the home or the multi-tenanted property.
- Remain two metres away from consumers during the showing.
- Don't shake consumers' hands or engage in physical contact.

9. Consider the Requirements of Multi-Tenanted Properties

- For multi-tenanted properties, discuss with the seller whether the strata council has any COVID-19 safety protocols to be aware of and incorporate these into your plan.
- Consider what cleaning protocols will be required for common areas and who will do them.

- Consider whether extra help is needed to manage entry to the building and other common areas.
- Encourage one-way flow with marked entrance and exits to multi-tenanted properties, where possible.
- Consider sharing the safety protocols you will be following with building occupants in multi-tenanted properties.
- Make hand sanitization available at high touchpoints such as elevators and interior doors in common areas.
- Ensure physical distancing can be maintained between consumers in common areas and post limits during the open house for elevators and other common areas if not already limited by the property.

10. Safely Conclude the Open House

- Close and lock the door at the end of the showings.
- Where agreed upon with the seller in advance, leave the lights on and the interior doors as found, to minimize touchpoints in the home.
- Recommend to clients that they disinfect their home after open houses, especially commonly touched areas like doorknob and faucet handles, and explain the risks of not doing so.
- Disinfect lockboxes and keys on exiting the home.