



FIRE SAFETY GUIDE FOR RENTAL & HMO TENANTS

Your simple guide to staying safe from fire.

If you live in rented accommodation or a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO), fire safety is something everyone needs to take seriously. Your landlord or property manager has important responsibilities for keeping the property safe, but **you also have an important part to play.**

Most importantly: know how to get out before there is a fire.

Take a few minutes when you move in to understand the alarms, escape routes and fire safety arrangements in your home. This guide covers 24 practical tips, a 5-minute move-in checklist, and where to find further government guidance.

 **IN AN EMERGENCY CALL 999**

1

Know how to escape

The first thing you should do when moving into a rented property or HMO is find out:

- Where is my normal exit?
- Where is the nearest alternative exit?
- Where are the fire doors?
- Where are the fire alarms?
- Where should I go if I need to evacuate?
- Can I open the doors on my escape route?
- Are the escape routes kept clear?

The government recommends that tenants find the easiest way to escape and check that fire exit doors can be opened without a key. **Don't wait until there is a fire to find out** – smoke can make it difficult to see and can cause you to become confused very quickly.

2

Keep escape routes clear

Never block communal corridors, stairways, landings or exits. Do not leave:

- Shoes
- Bicycles
- Bags
- Furniture
- Rubbish
- Boxes
- Electrical equipment
- Other belongings

in areas that people may need to use to escape. The government guidance specifically advises tenants to keep exits clear, including communal areas. If you see something blocking an escape route, report it.

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Keep fire doors closed

If your property has fire doors, **keep them closed when you are not passing through them**. Never wedge or prop a fire door open – fire doors are designed to help slow the spread of fire and smoke, giving people more time to escape.

If a fire door:

- Does not close properly
- Has been damaged
- Has a broken closer
- Has damaged seals
- Is difficult to open
- Has been wedged open

tell your landlord or property manager.

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Check your smoke alarms

Your home should have appropriate smoke alarms. In England, relevant rented properties must have at least one smoke alarm on each storey where there is a room used as living accommodation.

When you move in, check that you can see and hear the alarms. If an alarm is missing, damaged or appears not to work, tell your landlord or agent immediately. Do not remove batteries or disable alarms because they are inconvenient.

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What if the alarm keeps going off?

Don't automatically assume that a repeated alarm is a nuisance. It could be detecting:

- Cooking smoke
- Steam
- A developing fire
- Burning material
- Another source of smoke

Investigate safely. If you cannot establish why the alarm is sounding, treat it seriously. **Never disconnect a smoke alarm simply because it is inconvenient.** If the alarm appears faulty, report it — the government guidance says landlords must repair or replace smoke and carbon monoxide alarms once informed that they are faulty.

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Carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that cannot be seen, smelled or tasted. In England, landlords must provide a carbon monoxide alarm in relevant rooms containing a fixed combustion appliance, other than gas cookers.

If your carbon monoxide alarm sounds: **get outside into fresh air and call 999 if you believe there is an immediate danger.** Do not ignore a CO alarm or assume it is a false alarm. Tell your landlord or property manager as soon as possible.

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Be careful when cooking

Cooking is one of the most important fire risks in shared accommodation. Never leave cooking unattended. Take particular care when:

- Frying
- Using an oven
- Using a grill
- Cooking with oil
- Using electrical cooking equipment

Keep anything that could catch fire away from hobs and other sources of heat. If a pan catches fire: **do not move it.** If it is safe to do so, turn off the heat and leave the property. Never throw water onto a hot oil or fat fire — get outside and call **999**.

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Take care with electrical equipment

Faulty electrical equipment, damaged cables and overloaded sockets can cause fires. The government identifies faulty electrics, including appliances, wiring and overloaded sockets, as an important fire risk in rented accommodation. Simple rules:

- Don't overload sockets.
- Don't use damaged plugs or cables.
- Don't use electrical equipment that appears unsafe.
- Don't run cables where they can become damaged.
- Don't cover chargers or power supplies with clothing or bedding.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Report electrical faults to your landlord.

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Be careful with extension leads

Extension leads and adaptors have limits. Do not connect several extension leads or adaptors together to create a long chain. Avoid overloading sockets. If you need additional sockets, speak to your landlord rather than creating an unsafe arrangement.

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Smoking and fire safety

If you smoke:

- Never smoke in bed.
- Make sure cigarettes are completely extinguished.
- Use a proper ashtray.
- Keep smoking materials away from curtains, bedding and furniture.
- Never leave cigarettes burning unattended.

The government specifically advises tenants in shared and rented accommodation never to smoke in bed and to make sure cigarettes are properly extinguished.

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Be careful with candles

Candles and tea lights can start fires very quickly. If you use candles:

- Keep them away from curtains and other combustible materials.
- Keep them on a stable, heat-resistant surface.
- Never leave them unattended.
- Keep them away from children and pets.
- Extinguish them before going to sleep or leaving the room.

Better still, consider using battery-powered alternatives.

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Don't block heaters

Keep clothing, bedding, curtains, furniture and other combustible materials away from heaters. Never use heaters to dry clothes unless they are specifically designed for that purpose. If a heater supplied with the property appears damaged or unsafe, report it.

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Know what to do if there is a fire

If you discover a fire:

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|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Raise the alarm | Warn other people in the property. |
| 2. Get out | Leave immediately using the safest available escape route. |
| 3. Close doors behind you | If you can do so safely, closing doors behind you can help slow the spread of fire and smoke. |
| 4. Call 999 | Tell the fire and rescue service "Fire." Give them the address and any information they ask for. |
| 5. Do not go back inside | Once you are outside, stay outside. Do not return to collect possessions. |

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What if there is smoke in the corridor?

Do not simply assume that your normal route is safe. Consider your alternative escape route. If you cannot safely escape:

- Stay in your room if necessary.
- Close the door.
- Keep smoke out as much as possible.
- Call 999.
- Tell the fire service exactly where you are.
- Follow their instructions.

The safest action depends on the building's fire safety strategy and the circumstances of the fire.

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Never use a lift during a fire unless instructed

If your building has a lift, don't assume it is an escape route. Use the designated escape stairs and routes unless the building's specific fire strategy or the fire and rescue service tells you otherwise.

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Know where the fire exits are

If you live in a larger HMO or shared building, take a few minutes to identify:

- Fire exits
- Escape stairs
- Fire alarm sounders
- Emergency lighting
- Fire action notices
- Assembly point
- Alternative escape routes

Don't assume the route you use every day will always be available.

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Don't tamper with fire safety equipment

Never:

- Remove smoke alarm batteries
- Cover smoke detectors
- Disable alarms
- Damage fire doors
- Remove fire extinguishers
- Block fire exits
- Tamper with emergency lighting
- Remove fire safety signs

These systems are there to protect you and everyone else in the building.

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What if something is broken?

Report it. You should tell your landlord, letting agent or property manager if you notice:

- A faulty smoke alarm
- A faulty carbon monoxide alarm
- A damaged fire door
- A blocked escape route
- Broken emergency lighting
- A damaged fire exit
- Electrical problems
- Unsafe cooking equipment
- Missing fire safety signs
- Anything else that could increase the risk of fire

Don't assume that someone else has already reported it.

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What if another tenant creates a fire risk?

If another resident:

- Blocks an escape route
- Props open fire doors
- Disables alarms
- Stores combustible materials in communal areas
- Uses dangerous electrical equipment
- Creates another obvious fire risk

report it to the landlord or property manager. Don't put yourself at risk by confronting someone if you feel unsafe.

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If you have a disability or need additional assistance

Tell your landlord or property manager if you have circumstances that could make it more difficult for you to escape during a fire. This could include:

- Mobility difficulties
- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Other disabilities
- Difficulty using stairs
- Other circumstances affecting your ability to respond to an alarm or escape

Do not be embarrassed about asking for help. Fire safety arrangements should take account of the people who actually occupy the property.

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Your responsibilities as a tenant

Your landlord has significant legal responsibilities for fire safety, but tenants also have an important role. You should:

- Take reasonable care of yourself and others.
- Follow fire safety instructions.
- Keep escape routes clear.
- Keep fire doors closed.
- Report defects promptly.
- Never deliberately disable fire safety equipment.
- Follow the property's fire safety arrangements.
- Leave immediately if instructed to evacuate.

Fire safety works best when **landlords and tenants work together**.

23

What should my landlord provide?

The exact requirements depend on the property and applicable regulations. In general, landlords have responsibilities for providing and maintaining appropriate fire safety measures.

For rented homes in England, GOV.UK states that landlords must fit and test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and follow relevant fire safety regulations. For larger HMOs, additional fire precautions may be required, including appropriate means of escape and fire safety systems.

If you are concerned about the fire safety of your accommodation, raise the issue with your landlord or managing agent.

Use this simple 5-minute fire safety check before you unpack:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Find the main escape route. | ☐ Find the alternative escape route. |
| ☐ Locate the smoke alarms. | ☐ Find out what the alarm sounds like. |
| ☐ Check that you can open the escape doors. | ☐ Find the fire action notice. |
| ☐ Find the assembly point, if one is provided. | ☐ Check that communal escape routes are clear. |
| ☐ Check that fire doors close properly. | ☐ Know who to contact if you find a fire safety problem. |

Tick each box off as you go – it only takes a few minutes, and it could make all the difference if you ever need to get out in a hurry.

24**What if my landlord doesn't deal with a fire safety problem?**

Start by reporting the problem to your landlord or property manager. Keep a record of what you reported and when.

If you are still concerned and the problem is not dealt with, you can contact your local authority or local fire and rescue service for advice. GOV.UK recommends contacting your landlord or building owner first and then contacting your local authority or fire and rescue service if concerns remain.

**Know your escape route**

Know how you would get outside if there was a fire.

**Keep fire doors closed**

Don't wedge or prop them open.

**Take alarms seriously**

Never disable or ignore a smoke or carbon monoxide alarm.

**Be careful with electricity**

Don't overload sockets or use damaged equipment.

**Never leave cooking unattended**

Especially when using oil or high temperatures.

**Never smoke in bed**

Make sure smoking materials are completely extinguished.

**Never leave candles unattended**

Keep them away from anything that can burn.

**Report problems**

Tell your landlord or property manager about fire safety defects.

**If there is a fire — get out**

Raise the alarm, leave the building and call 999. Never go back inside.

The Home Office and GOV.UK publish specific fire safety guidance for people living in shared and rented accommodation. These are worth bookmarking:

Fire Safety in Shared or Rented Accommodation

Home Office advice for people living in shared and rented accommodation.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-in-shared-or-rented-accommodation>

How to Rent a Safe Home

GOV.UK guidance on fire risks and other safety issues for people renting their homes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-rent-a-safe-home/how-to-rent-a-safe-home>

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Alarm requirements for rented accommodation in England.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarms-explanatory-booklet-for-landlords>

Fire Safety of Your Building

Advice for tenants and residents concerned about their building's fire safety.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-of-your-building-advice-for-tenants-and-residents>



Fire safety isn't just your landlord's responsibility. Your landlord must provide and maintain appropriate fire safety arrangements, but your actions can also make a major difference.

**Keep exits clear. Keep fire doors closed. Don't disable alarms. Report problems.
Know how to escape.**

GET OUT • STAY OUT • CALL 999