

HOW TO...

RENT

A SAFE HOME

A guide for current and prospective tenants in England



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This information is frequently updated. Search on GOV.UK for **How to Rent a Safe Home** to ensure you have the latest version.

The online version contains links you can click on to get more information.

If you do not have internet access, ask your local library to help.

Landlord duties

- Landlords should keep their properties safe and free from health hazards.
- Landlords are responsible for carrying out most repairs.
- Landlords must make sure gas appliances and flues are safely installed and maintained by a Gas Safe registered engineer and give you a copy of the Gas Safety Certificate.
- Landlords must provide you with an Energy Performance Certificate.

Do not rent from a landlord who cannot show that they have met their legal duties and do not accept a reduced rent in exchange for poor or dangerous conditions.

Who is this guide for?



This guide is for current and prospective tenants and supplements the Government's How to rent guide. It gives a more detailed explanation of the main hazards you can find in a rental property which suggest it may not be safe for you and your household to live in.

It also explains your landlord's duties and what you can do if you have concerns or need to make a complaint.

Links



This guide is best viewed online as it contains hyperlinks.

If you are reading this on a computer or tablet, you can click on the links to go to other websites with more detailed information.

They are coloured and underlined [like this](#).

On Android or Windows devices, links work better if you download Acrobat Reader from get.adobe.com/uk/reader.



CONTRACT

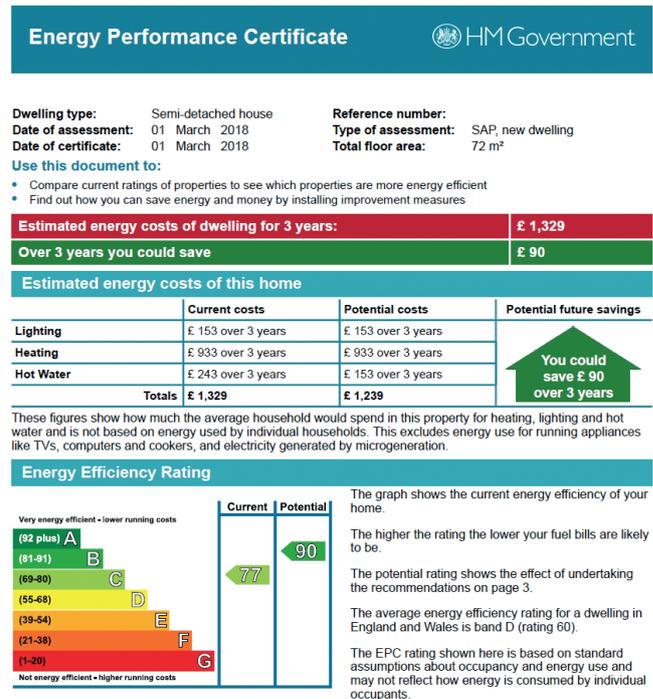
Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

Look at the EPC, it will:

- Give an indication of **running costs** (bills for gas and electricity).
- Tell you the **overall energy efficiency rating** for the property.
- Help you identify **drawbacks** to the property; such as solid walls, uninsulated roof, single glazed windows etc.
- List **improvements** that have been recommended; such as double glazed windows, loft insulation etc.

Landlords must:

- provide an EPC to someone who is interested in renting the property at the earliest opportunity, and provide a copy to any person that moves into the property;
- show the energy rating of the home when being advertised, including in newspapers, magazines, or in any written material produced by the landlord or letting agents, and on the internet.



You can ask your landlord to make energy performance improvements based on the EPC recommendations.

From April 2018, unless they have been granted an exemption, landlords will not be permitted to rent out homes that have an EPC rating of F or G.



Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

All properties must have working:

- Smoke alarms** (on every floor used as living accommodation)...
- ...and a **carbon monoxide alarm** (in rooms using solid fuels – such as a coal fire or wood burning stove).



Landlords must make sure that alarms are working on the first day of the tenancy. After that, tenants should take responsibility for their own safety and test alarms regularly to make sure they are working and replace the batteries where needed. Landlords must pay for the cost of a broken or faulty alarm.

[Multi-occupied properties](#) usually require more fire safety measures (such as heat alarms, fire extinguishers and fire blankets).

Electrical Safety

Landlords also have a legal duty to make sure that electrical installations and electrical equipment supplied is safe at the outset of a tenancy and kept in good working order.

Checks to make on a property before you rent

- Is there a **working smoke alarm on each floor**?
- Is a **carbon monoxide alarm fitted** (if required)?
- Have you seen a **Gas Safety Certificate**?
- Where can the **gas or water supply be switched off in an emergency**?
- Have you seen an **Energy Performance Certificate**?
- Does the **water and heating system** work?
- When are **refuse and recycling collected**?
- How do you **contact the landlord** with an issue or complaint?



What to look for

There are a range of potential hazards in a property that could harm the health and safety of people living or visiting there. Some hazards are more dangerous and/or common than others.



Other hazards, such as pollutants, may be equally, or more serious, but may be less likely to occur, less visible, or may affect only certain parts of the country, such as:

- Radiation (Radon gas)
- Asbestos
- Lead
- Pesticides

What to do if you identify hazards

Tell the landlord

- Report any need for repairs to your landlord or property agent.
- Put your concerns in writing and keep a copy.
- Do this straight away for issues that risk your health and safety, such as faulty electrical wiring.
- There will be a risk to your deposit or your landlord taking you to court, to recover the cost of damages if a minor repair turns into a major problem because you did not report it. Most landlords would prefer to know sooner to make the most cost-effective repair.
- Your landlord should tell you when you can expect the repairs to be done. A landlord has a right to carry out repairs and tenants must allow access at reasonable times with reasonable notice (at least 24 hours).

What your landlord must do

Your landlord is always responsible for repairs to:

- The property's structure and exterior.
- Basins, sinks, baths and other sanitary fittings including pipes and drains.
- Heating and hot water.
- Gas appliances, pipes, flues and ventilation.
- Electrical wiring.
- Any damage they cause by attempting repairs.

The landlord may be responsible for repairing common parts of the building, but these could be owned by another person. **Check with your landlord who is responsible for repairs to common parts or communal areas of the building.**

Your responsibilities

- The landlord does not have to pay to repair damage the tenant has caused, e.g. if water leaks into another flat from an overflowing bath, the tenant is responsible for paying for the repairs. Tenants are also responsible for paying to put right any damage caused by their family and friends.
- Do not carry out repairs unless the tenancy agreement says you can. You can't be forced to do repairs that are your landlord's responsibility.



Condition of the property

Damp and mould

Damp and mould can cause or worsen respiratory problems, infections, allergies or asthma. It can also affect the immune system, particularly in young children. Damp also contributes to excess heat loss and puts up heating bills, as well as causing damage to building fabric and contents, including clothes and furniture.

Landlords:

- Must make repairs to the property's structure and exterior (this includes repairs that are likely to be the cause of damp and mould – such as leaking gutters or wet outside walls).
- Should make sure that the property is properly ventilated.

Tenants:

- Look out for damp patches on walls and ceilings, mould, peeling wallpaper and condensation on windows.
- Check if the property smells musty.
- Check that you can open and close windows securely.

Heat

- Excess heat in a property can cause dehydration, stroke and heart attacks, breathing difficulties and infections. This is more likely to affect older people.

Cold

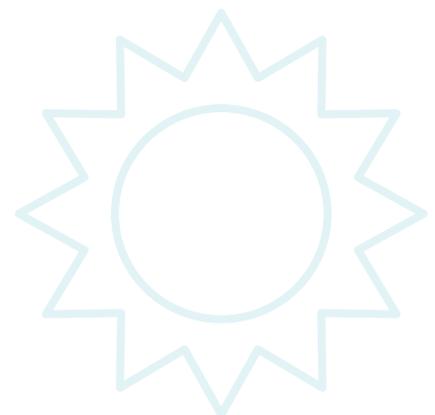
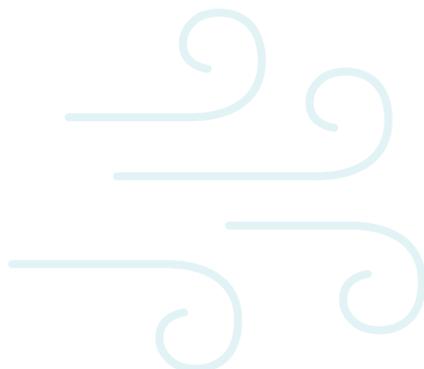
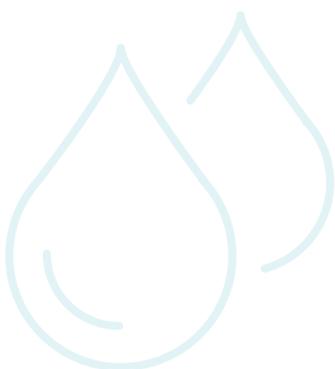
A cold home is one that cannot be maintained at a temperature between 18°C to 21°C at a reasonable cost to the occupier. Excess cold can lead to flu, pneumonia and bronchitis; heart attacks or strokes, hypothermia and even death.

Landlords:

- Must keep the heating supply in repair and proper working order.
- Should supply adequate heating which enable tenants to heat the property at a reasonable cost, and repair any broken windows and doors.

Tenants:

- Check if there is [central heating](#) (radiators or air vents connected to a central heat source, such as a boiler), and that it is working properly.
- If there is no central heating, make sure there is an [alternative type of adequate heating](#), such as storage heaters.
- A low EPC rating indicates that your property does not retain heat very well and may be very cold during the winter. Ask your landlord to carry out some of the recommendations in the [Energy Performance Certificate](#).



Accidents

Trip and fall hazards

Trips and falls can lead to significant injury, broken bones or loss of confidence. They are more likely to take place in baths and showers, on stairs or around low balconies and windows. Older people and under 5s tend to be more vulnerable.

Landlords:

- Should keep floor surfaces in good repair and free from trip hazards.

Tenants:

- Look for any obvious trip hazards and/or uneven surfaces (particularly on stairs, bathroom floors, at the exits of showers).
- Check there is good lighting on stairs, and that stairs have a handrail.
- Make sure that low-level large windows have restrictors or safety rails.

Fire risks

Fire can cause burns or being overcome by smoke poisoning or gas.

Landlords:

- Must provide working smoke alarms on every floor.
- Should situate cooking, heating and other electrical appliances away from flammable materials and fire exits.
- Should regularly test appliances and maintain them in a good condition, making sure that any furniture supplied has the required labels and fireproofing.

Tenants:

- Check for working smoke alarms on each floor.
- Find the easiest way to escape in the event of a fire, and check that locks on fire exit doors can be opened without a key.

Electrical hazards

Faulty wiring and old sockets can lead to shocks, burns and even death. Wired fuses or cartridges present a much higher risk and are a significant fire hazard.

Landlords:

- Must make sure that electrical installations and electrical equipment supplied is safe at the outset of the tenancy.
- Should regularly carry out basic safety checks to make sure that the electrical installations and appliances are safe and working.
- In large [Houses in Multiple Occupation \(HMOs\)](#), carry out [safety checks on electrical installations](#) every five years.

Tenants:

- Check that the lights turn on and off and check that plug sockets are not coming loose from the wall.
- There should be no frayed or exposed cables or wires.
- Check there are [Residual Current Devices \(RCDs\)](#) protecting all circuits (An RCD is a safety device that switches off electricity automatically if there is a fault).



Space and security

Overcrowding

It is illegal for landlords to let a property to more people than the property can safely house. Overcrowding can cause accidents and the spread of contagious disease, and can prevent quick and safe exit in the event of a fire.

Landlords:

- Should make sure there is an adequate area for sleeping; and that kitchen, bathroom, living or other recreational spaces are sufficient for the number of occupants.

Tenants:

- Walk through the property and see if there is enough room for each person to have a bed and furniture.
- Make sure there are adequate kitchen and bathroom facilities for the number of occupants. Look for a suitable area where you can cook and prepare food.

Security

A property should contain doors and windows that can be securely locked. However, if the property is burgled, the landlord is not likely to be responsible for the loss of your belongings, so you need to make sure you insure what you own.

Landlords:

- Should make sure that windows, doors or other points of entry are properly secured.

Tenants:

- Check there are suitable locks on the doors and windows.
- Check whether access to the property is well-lit.

Lighting and noise

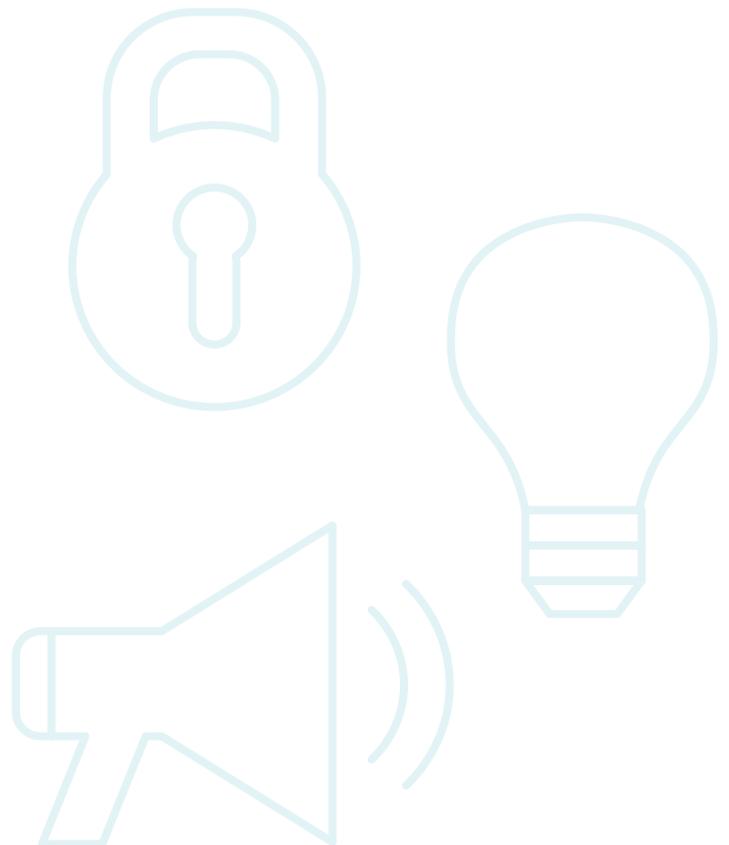
Inadequate lighting can cause eyestrain, headaches, low mood, trips and falls. Excessive noise can cause sleep disturbance; poor concentration, headaches and anxiety.

Landlords:

- Should provide adequate lighting (although tenants are usually responsible for replacing light bulbs after the start of the tenancy).

Tenants:

- Make sure there are appropriate fittings for light bulbs, and that bulbs can be easily changed.
- Listen for noise from neighbours and roads.
- Ask for a second viewing at a different time of day to check noise levels.



Risk of infection

Hygiene

Issues caused by a lack of hygiene in the property and inadequate refuse disposal can lead to stomach upsets, infection and diseases, asthma and allergies.

Landlords:

- Should provide adequate cooking, bathroom and waste disposal facilities.
- In large [Houses in Multiple Occupation \(HMOs\)](#), landlords must provide enough bins for rubbish and adequate means of disposing of rubbish.

Tenants:

- Ask about how often refuse is collected, especially in any shared communal areas.
- Check there is space for and access to outdoor bins.
- Check the garden (if there is one) is not overgrown or full of rubbish. Ask who is responsible for the upkeep of the garden.
- Make sure there is sufficient room in the kitchen for storing, preparing and cooking food.

Water supply

Inadequate or unsafe water supply or lack of space for personal washing and for clothes washing or drying, and lack of facilities for the removal of wastewater (blocked/broken drainpipes) can lead to upset stomachs, infections, diseases.

Landlords:

- Must keep the water supply in repair and proper working order.
- Should make sure the property has an adequate water supply and drinking water is supplied from the mains, instead of a water storage tank.

Tenants:

- Check the plumbing works by flushing toilets and turning taps or showers on.
- Check cupboards underneath sinks are dry. If they are damp, this may indicate a plumbing problem.
- Run the hot water and make sure there is adequate hand washing facilities.
- See if there is a cold feed for drinking water (rather than from cold water tank).

Pests and vermin

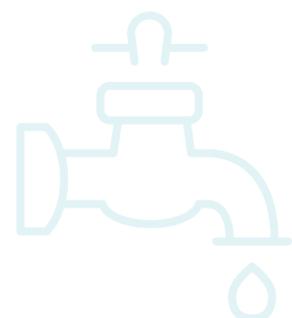
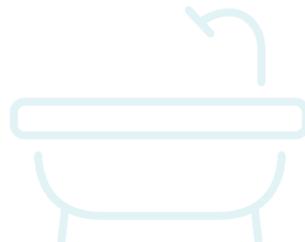
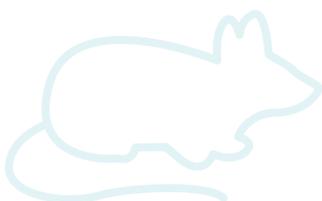
Infestations from insects, rats and mice can cause vomiting and diarrhoea. Pests and vermin can also cause asthma, other allergic reactions and stress. Pests can contaminate food and preparation surfaces, spoil food and cause anxiety.

Landlords:

- Must maintain the structure and exterior of the property (helps to prevent entry by pests or vermin)
- Should provide secure waste disposal facilities.
- Should ensure the property is free of pests and vermin (in cases where these have not been caused by the lifestyle of the tenant).

Tenants:

- Check for bed bugs or carpet mites if the property is furnished.
- Look for cracks holes or voids that would allow the entry or shelter of pests.
- Look for signs of vermin – such as mice droppings or nests.



Other hazards

Chemicals and hazardous substances

Asbestos was commonly used in building materials in the 1950s and 1960s as a material to resist the spread of fire. It was also used in [Artex](#) predominantly before 1985. However it was not banned from use in new buildings until around 2000. Materials containing asbestos are generally safe if they are in good condition but if broken or damaged can release harmful fibres and dust into the air. Your landlord should seek professional advice on its removal. You can find out more from: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos>.

In certain parts of the country there is a risk to health from exposure to **Radon Gas** and you can find more details from: <http://www.ukradon.org>.

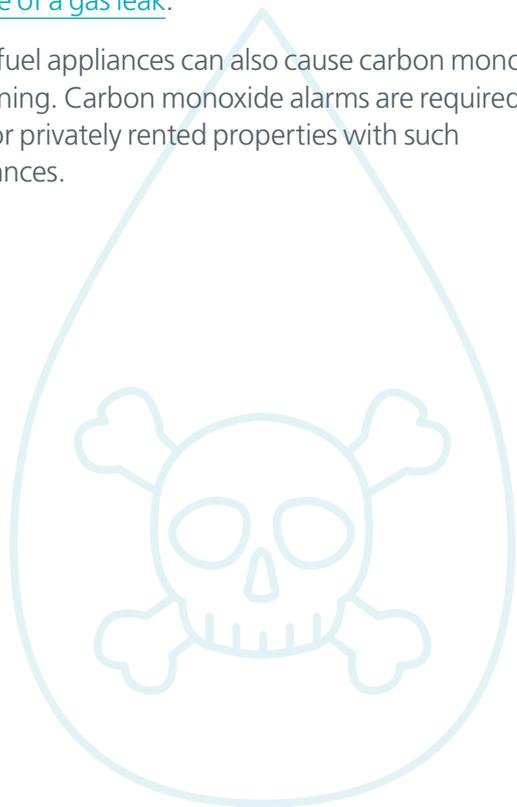
Pesticides and other chemicals used to treat timber mould growth and pests can cause breathing difficulties and skin diseases. You can find out more from: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pesticides>.

Lead from paint or water/waste pipes has the potential to cause nervous disorders, mental health or behavioural problems. Paint with a high level of lead content tends to be found in older houses and dissolved lead is only likely in acidic (i.e. usually private) water supplies. A common warning sign is rusting pipes, which can lead to rust being visible in the water coming out of taps.

Gas appliances which are faulty can release carbon monoxide, which can cause suffocation. Commonly seen carbon monoxide warning signs include stains on fireplaces and popping sounds coming from a kitchen grill which can burn when closed. For more information about carbon monoxide: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/co.htm>.

Leaking gas can cause explosions. You should know what to do and how you can [switch off the gas supply in case of a gas leak](#).

Solid fuel appliances can also cause carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide alarms are required by law for privately rented properties with such appliances.



Structural defects

Properties that have been badly maintained can lead to a risk of physical injury. In extreme cases, there could be a risk of collapse of a part or whole of the building.

Make sure:

- The roof looks in a good state of repair – look for any loose tiles or leaking gutters.
- The windows open and close properly.
- There are no cracks or holes in walls, loose panels or badly fitted partitions or structural elements.
- You can access the property entrance and all rooms safely – you should not have to put yourself at risk of physical injury by climbing or walking on structurally unsafe ground, stairs or landings.

What to do if repairs aren't done

Tell your council

If the landlord does not carry out the necessary repairs you can report the matter to the environmental health department of your local council. They must take action if they think the problems could harm you or cause a nuisance to others.

Your local council may carry out a [Housing Health and Safety Rating System](#) inspection to identify what hazards exist. An environmental health or housing officer will assess the risk to you or your household's health and safety. If the council find poor conditions that are a serious risk to you or your household's health and safety, they have a duty to take the most appropriate action in relation to the hazard.

The council can give the landlord a notice asking them to carry out repairs or undertake remedial action within a certain timescale. In certain circumstances, they might carry out emergency repairs themselves. The local authority will not charge you for this service.

Local authorities have powers to prevent landlords from letting out property if they have been convicted of a banning order offence, such as failure to comply with a formal notice requiring safety improvements or carrying out an illegal eviction. You may wish to contact your local housing authority for further information.

Protection from retaliatory eviction

Retaliatory eviction is when a landlord asks a tenant to leave their property because they have asked for a necessary repair. This is an unacceptable practice.

Provided they have raised a legitimate complaint about the condition of their home (verified by the local authority), tenants are safeguarded by the Deregulation Act 2015. This law protects tenants in cases where a landlord attempts to **unfairly evict them after they have asked for repairs to be carried out**.

Once you have [made a complaint](#), the local authority should carry out an inspection of the property, and if appropriate, they will issue a notice to your landlord, requiring them to take action to address the problem(s). Where a landlord has not addressed the issues highlighted by the local authority they cannot legally evict the tenant(s) for 6 months using the ['no-fault' eviction procedure](#) (called a 'section 21 eviction').

Consider taking court action

The law (Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985) enables tenants to take legal action against landlords for cases of 'disrepair'. Before considering taking court action, you should seek independent advice on your rights and responsibilities. You may also be interested in the Ministry of Justice [pre-action protocol for housing disrepair cases](#).



Additional information

This guidance is not exhaustive.

You should always seek advice from an independent organisation on any specific situation that arises.

Your local council's environmental health team will be able to advise you on specific cases.

Shelter have produced advice on [how to get in contact with your local environmental health team](#).

You can also find your local council's website here: www.gov.uk/find-local-council.

These organisations may also be able to help:

Shelter

The housing and homelessness charity.

Citizens Advice

Free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

Gas Safe Register

Help and advice on gas safety issues.

Electrical Safety First

Help and advice on electrical safety issues.

Accreditation Network UK

A central resource for tenants, landlords and scheme operators interested in accreditation of private rented housing.

Care & Repair England

An independent charitable organisation which aims to improve older people's housing.

Government accepts no responsibility for the content of external sites.

Also in this series

The Government's **'How to Rent' guide** helps tenants and landlords in the private rented sector understand their rights and responsibilities.

The Government's **'How to Let' guide** provides information for landlords and property agents about their rights and responsibilities when letting out property.

The Government's **'How to Lease' guide** helps current and prospective leaseholders understand their rights and responsibilities.

Important dates for your records

Gas Safety Record

Date the current certificate expires	
Date the engineer is attending	
Date the new Gas Safety Certificate has been received	
NOTES	

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Testing

Date tested	
Working? Yes/No?	
Date batteries replaced	
NOTES	

Reported repairs

What has been reported? And to who?	When was it reported? (date)	How was it reported? (phone/email/text?)	Response / Notes	Date repaired

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