

Tenant health and safety advice in your home

Fire safety

Fires in the home kill hundreds of people in the UK every year. Small fires are more common, but they can still cause serious injuries and damage homes and possessions.

By taking a few simple steps and being aware, you can lower the chances of a fire in your home.

Easy steps for fire safety

- Test your smoke alarm once a week by pressing the test button and holding it until the alarm sounds
- Change the battery in the alarm once a year, unless it is a 10 year alarm or connected to the mains
- Make a fire action plan so everyone in your home knows how to escape if there is a fire
- Keep doors and windows clear so that people can escape if there is a fire
- Make sure the keys to doors and windows are easy to find
- Be extra careful in the kitchen. More than half of fires in homes happen during cooking
- Be extra careful when cooking with hot oil. Think about buying a deep-fat fryer which is controlled by a thermostat
- Never leave candles lit in rooms no one is in or rooms where children are on their own
- Make sure candles are in secure holders on a surface that doesn't burn and are away from anything that could burn
- Make sure cigarettes are stubbed out properly and are carefully thrown away
- Never smoke in bed. Get into the habit of closing doors at night
- Don't overload electrical sockets and always switch off and unplug electrical appliances when they're not in use.
- Keep matches and lighters where children can't see or reach them
- Be extra careful when you're tired or have been drinking.

Mobility scooters

If you have a mobility scooter you must make your own arrangements to store and charge it.

Due to our clear corridors policy you must not store them in communal areas, including landings, lifts, foyers, stairwells, walkways and community rooms, or run extension leads into corridors to charge them.

This is because they can present a risk to other tenants in the event of a fire.

Electrical safety

A rolling programme of testing the electrical installations is being carried out. This is called a 'periodic inspection'.

These are carried out approximately every 5 years by an inspecting electrician who has been specially trained in this area.

Electrical engineers will call at properties and carry out a test to check the safety of the electrical wiring, lights and sockets, etc.

Dos and Don'ts:

Do:

- Let your landlord have access to your house to test the electrical installation (with 24 hours written notice)
- Report any appliances that don't work straight away to your landlord
- Use appliances according to the user instructions
- Unplug electrical things like hairdryers when you're not using them

Don't:

- Plug too many appliances into one socket
- Ignore worn flexes on appliances
- Do your own DIY repairs on appliances or sockets

General safety rules:

- Use only good quality plugs
- Make sure plugs are wired correctly
- Use short, undamaged flexes
- Check flexes and fittings on a regular basis
- Always fit the correct fuse for the appliance:

Up to 700 watts - 3 amp

700 - 1000 watts - 5 amp

Over 1000 watts - 13 amp

Gas safety

When gas leaks from a heating appliance or doesn't burn properly, too much carbon monoxide is produced. Carbon monoxide is a gas with no smell, taste or colour but it's poisonous. It can kill with no warning in just a few hours.

That's why you must let us service the gas appliance in your home once a year. **It's the law and part of your tenancy agreement.**

People at risk

Carbon monoxide poisoning could happen to anyone, but babies, children, pregnant women and people with a heart problem are most at risk. You're especially at risk when you're asleep because you might not wake up and notice the symptoms.

The danger signs

You might feel tired, drowsy or sick or have headaches or tummy pains. These symptoms are like many common illnesses and could easily be confused with flu or tiredness. Get urgent medical advice if you or your family have any of these symptoms and you think carbon monoxide might be the reason.

If you suspect a gas leak:

- Open doors and windows to get rid of fumes
- Check to see if the gas has been left on unlit or if a pilot light has gone out
- **Call the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999. Call from outside your home. Using a phone inside, even a mobile, could cause an explosion.**
- Turn off the gas at the meter
- Don't use switches or anything electrical
- Don't smoke or use naked flames

How to stay safe

- Always have your gas appliances serviced by our contractor who only uses Gas Safe-registered engineers. **It is against the law for someone who is not Gas Safe registered to install or service a gas appliance**
- Always have a gas service every 12 months
- Never use a gas appliance if you think it's not working properly

- Never cover an appliance or block air vents or grills, air bricks and outside flues
- Always use a carbon monoxide detector or alarm

You should follow this safety advice whether your gas is supplied from the mains or a bottle.

Do you know where to turn off the gas supply in your home? If not, find out!

Legionella

Legionella bacteria are found naturally in water sources. They can multiply in domestic water systems given the right conditions of temperature and nutrients. Inhalation or ingestion of legionella bacteria can cause a form of pneumonia called legionnaire's disease, as well as other less serious illnesses

Aster Group will carry out risk assessments to its housing stock, in line with recommendations determined by the Health and Safety Executive

The risk in domestic properties is very small given the relative small size of most domestic water systems and the high throughput. To avoid the risk of this bacteria forming, the following regular operations are advised:

Legionella survives best in water temperatures of 20-45 degrees celsius. It starts to die if heated to above 50 degrees celsius. If you have a hot water cylinder you should ensure that your water temperature exceeds 60 degrees celsius, by turning up your cylinder thermostat.

Shower heads and hoses should be dismantled and descaled using proprietary domestic descalant every three months or when the shower rose shows signs of blocking.

If not used for more than once a week the bath, basin, and sink taps should be run for a minute. Similarly, the shower hose and rose should be flushed through in this manner

Lifts

- All lifts are regularly checked and serviced by our lift contractor to make sure they are working correctly.
- Lift problems can be caused by tenants who wedge the doors open or press the buttons all at once. We ask you not to do this to make sure the lifts are kept in working order.

- All lifts contain an alarm button, which you can use to get help if the lift breaks down whilst you are in it. All of our lifts feature a voice link, so you can speak to an operator at Otis. They will send an engineer who should arrive within 60 minutes.
- Never attempt to escape from a broken down lift.
- Please do not overload lifts with furniture when moving into or out of your property
- Please report any defects associated with lifts.

Contractors

For your own personal safety and peace of mind, we would suggest that you always ask any caller for proof of their identity (they should all carry ID cards) and if any doubt, ask them to wait whilst you phone your landlord to check.

When we carry out work, we take all necessary precautions to protect our tenants and the general public. At times it may not be safe for you to be in the area where a contractor is working and we ask you to follow any advice and instruction they may give you. We have a safeguarding policy and will not be able to work in a property where there is an unaccompanied child.

We regularly inspect and monitor the standard of work our contractors do, and make any necessary changes or improvements. We also have an independent company doing quarterly audits.

Heating

Hot water systems:

Safety advice

New hot water systems in homes have immersion heaters with thermostats that stop working if something goes wrong. But systems fitted more than three years ago don't have this.

In other parts of the country, a few people lost their lives when the water tank in the loft overheated and burst, burning them with boiling water. This can happen in any house, owned or rented, which has a faulty immersion heater. However, it's very rare and there are usually some warning signs before a tank bursts.

What to look out for:

- Very hot water coming out of your hot taps
- Warm or hot water coming out of your cold taps
- Unusual noises from your hot water tank, like banging or bubbling
- Steam or moisture in the roof space.

What to do:

- Turn off the immersion heater straight away (the switch is usually near the hot water tank in the airing cupboard).
- Call us any time of day on 0800 6 12 10 10. Calls are free from landlines but not from mobile phones.

Next steps

If you ring us with an emergency, we'll send a repair worker as soon as possible. Before visiting your home we'll check our records to see what type of hot water system you have in your home. This might tell us that you're not at risk and have a different problem

If you have an electric immersion heater to heat your hot water and the water doesn't heat, don't worry. Turn off the immersion heater and call us on the freephone number above.

If you have an electric immersion heater to heat your hot water and the system is working normally, you don't need to do anything. We'll be doing thermostat checks in our homes as part of our routine repair visits.

Security

Entrance doors to the building should be kept shut to maintain security for tenants in the block. Please do not wedge doors open or give access to anyone you do not know.

Most blocks of flats have a door entry and intercom system. These are normally operated using a key fob. If you lose your key fob, please contact us.

Play area

Aster Group manages a number of children's playgrounds in Wiltshire and Somerset with outdoor play equipment designed to offer children fresh air, friends and exercise.

We'll carry out regular routine and technical inspections but it's also important for parents to make sure that faulty equipment, improper surfaces, and careless behaviour don't ruin the fun. Repairs can be reported to your landlord on the number displayed on playground signage.

Each year many children are treated in hospital for playground-related injuries. Many of these could have been prevented with the proper supervision.

You can make the playground entertaining and safe for your children by checking equipment for potential hazards and following some simple safety guidelines. Teaching your children to how to play safely is important: If they know the rules of the playground, they're less likely to get hurt.

Adult supervision

Adult supervision can help prevent injuries by making sure children properly use playground equipment and don't engage in unsafe behaviour around it. If an injury does occur, an adult can assist the child and administer any needed first aid right away.

Small children should always have adult supervision on the playground. Young children (and sometimes older ones) can't always gauge distances properly and aren't capable of foreseeing dangerous situations by themselves. Older children like to test their limits on the playground but should only use equipment designed for their age group.

Radon

What is radon gas?

Radon is the biggest source of radiation in our lives and is found at varying levels across Britain. A naturally occurring, radioactive gas, it's formed by the breakdown of uranium found in all soil and rocks. Outdoors, it disperses harmlessly into the air, but once it finds its way indoors, through gaps and cracks in floors and walls, it may build up to potentially harmful levels.

What are the dangers?

As radon decays, it releases tiny radioactive particles into the atmosphere which, when breathed in, can damage the lungs. Exposure to high levels of radon gas causes a higher risk of lung cancer. If you smoke, these risks are greatly increased.

How do we test for radon gas in your home?

Radon gas is invisible and odourless, so the only way to know for sure if levels in your home are too high is to test the air. We will use radon maps provided by the Health Protection Agency to identify if your home is likely to be affected by radon and, if necessary, install a detector. You can do this by ordering a radon detection pack. Detectors will be installed to monitor radon levels in your home for three months. We will then be sent a report about the radon levels in your home. If levels are high, the report will include advice and information on bringing them down.

What can we do if radon levels in your home are too high?

The most effective way of reducing radon levels is to prevent the gas getting into your home in the first place. The best way to do this is by extracting the

gas from underneath the floor before it can seep upwards. If your home has a solid floor, a sump can be installed to extract the radon from beneath the house and expel it harmlessly outside. If your home has spaces underneath the floor, these can be ventilated using airbricks or a small electric fan.

Keeping your home well ventilated may also help, but will not reduce levels significantly.

Sewage treatment works and pumping stations

Aster Group operates a number of sewage treatment works and pumping stations. These are regularly inspected and properly managed to protect local residents and the environment. If you notice anything unusual or that these sites are not secure you should phone the number displayed on the site safety sign and not enter the site.

Asbestos

If your home was built before 2000, it might have asbestos in it. Asbestos is a natural mineral made up of lots of small fibres. It was used in buildings for many years but it's banned now.

Your Tenants' Handbook tells you where asbestos might be in your home and how to stay safe. The important thing is not to worry. Just read our advice and get in touch anytime.

Don't disturb materials

Materials containing asbestos aren't dangerous if they're sealed, in good condition and left alone. But, if you want to carry out DIY, like drilling boards to fix shelves or removing bath panels and you're not sure whether they've got asbestos in them, call us for advice.

Why can asbestos be harmful?

If someone breathes in asbestos fibres, they can get stuck in their lungs. This could bring on diseases, especially cancer.

Asbestos is usually only a risk if it gets disturbed or damaged and then fibres float into the air. If something has asbestos in it and it's in good condition, or in a place it can't be disturbed, it's usually safer to leave it where it is.

Can I tell what asbestos is from looking at it?

It's not easy to tell if something's got asbestos in it. It needs to be tested by someone who has special training. If your home has asbestos, it's very unlikely it's harmful.

Where is asbestos?

Asbestos is in all sorts of places, like floor tiles, lagging around pipes and shed roofs. The picture in the leaflet on this page shows the different places around the home which might have asbestos.

What happens if I think there's asbestos in my home?

There's no need to panic. Just let us know and we'll send an asbestos surveyor to your home to take a look and a sample. If there's asbestos but it's in good condition and not damaged, it's safer to leave it where it is. We'll keep an eye on it and then remove it when we do planned work on your home. If our surveyor says the asbestos must be removed, a specialist company will do it without any risk to you or your family.

Condensation

Beating condensation

Condensation can cause mould on walls and soft furnishings and make wooden skirting boards rot. It also encourages mould spores to grow, which can increase the risk of respiratory illnesses. But don't worry; here are some easy steps to keep condensation at bay.

Recognising condensation

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If the air gets colder, it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. This is condensation. It mainly shows up during cold weather on cold surfaces. It can be found in corners, on or near windows, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. It often forms on north-facing walls.

Recognising damp

Condensation can be mistaken for damp. Damp can come from leaking pipes, rain seeping through the roof, a blocked gutter, window frames or cracked pipe or because the damp course is faulty or there is no damp course. Using a dehumidifier will help to dry out the damp.

Dealing with mould

To kill and remove mould, wipe down walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash. Dry-clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets. After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help or prevent mould.

Avoiding condensation

The only way to avoid severe mould is to reduce the condensation in your home. Produce less moisture by:

- Covering pans when cooking and do not leave kettles boiling
- Not using paraffin and bottled gas heaters
- Hanging washing outdoors to dry

- Ventilating your home – keep a small window ajar or a trickle vent open

Keeping your home warm

In cold weather keep low background heating on all day, even when there is no one at home. This is very important in flats and bungalows, or other properties where bedrooms are not above a warm living room.

Pests

Keep pests away

- Don't leave out food or rubbish where it can attract birds, rats or mice. We'll charge you for any damage caused by pests
- If you can't deal with pests in your home or they're in a shared area, phone our repairs hotline
- If you're having problems with insects or wild animals in your area, contact your local council.