

REAC Q&A on Inspections and the COVID-19 Pandemic

As we continue to ramp up our inspection capacity following the suspension of REAC inspections due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the volume of questions regarding how HUD is balancing the risk of COVID-19 with its mandate to perform physical inspections of properties to ensure HUD's standard of providing decent, safe, and sanitary housing in good repair is maintained. Given this, we would like to provide clarification on some Frequently Asked Questions regarding how to inform HUD of COVID-19 cases at your property, how to request a deferral, and what criteria HUD uses in determining whether to grant a deferral.

1. Why is HUD performing inspections during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Response: The decision to resume inspections in June 2021 focused on balancing the health risks of bringing people into contact during the pandemic with the health risks of property conditions for residents. That balancing is still essential, and HUD continues to adapt as the pandemic continues to evolve. HUD is balancing these risks with a focus on ensuring safe, decent housing for residents.

HUD has made special accommodations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, including extending the notice period to 28 days advance notice, requiring certain precautions during inspections, and developing a holistic process for assessing circumstances where a deferral or cancellation of an inspection may be required due to COVID-19. This review is performed on a case-by-case basis based on information provided by the property and the individual circumstances presented.

2. What precautions is HUD taking in performing REAC inspections in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Response: REAC is requiring inspectors to take the following precautions against the spread of COVID-19:

- Wear PPE including masks, gloves, and for properties with elderly populations, face shield, in addition to masks, for properties with elderly populations
- Frequently use hand sanitizer
- Practice physical distancing
- Follow state and local guidelines.

For additional information please refer to Inspector Notice No. 2021-01:

<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/COVID19InspectorProtocolNotice2021-01.pdf>

3. If a property owner or management agent (POA) has concerns about proceeding with a REAC inspection due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how should they communicate those concerns to HUD?

Response: The POA should communicate any COVID related concerns to the inspector at the 28-, 14-, and 2-day notification intervals established in Inspector Notice No. 2021-01. If you have any additional questions please coordinate with your inspector or you may reach out to REAC's Technical Assistance Center (TAC) at (888) 245-4860 or via email at REAC_TAC@hud.gov.

4. If a tenant at a property has concerns about a REAC inspector entering their unit during the inspection, what should they do?

Response: Residents have the option of declining to have a REAC inspector enter their unit if they are concerned about their health or safety due to COVID-19. Residents should communicate any health or safety related concerns to the POA. The inspector will work with the POA to select alternate units for inspection at the property. Residents who are home at the time of the inspection may elect to leave or stay in the unit in alignment with their preference.

5. What criteria does HUD consider when deciding whether to cancel or defer an inspection due to COVID-19?

Response: REAC works with properties and inspectors to analyze postponement requests on a case-by-case basis. This process balances the risks presented by the COVID-19 pandemic against the risk of not conducting inspections. HUD considers factors such as available alternate units, conditions at the property, property elements, property designation status, etc. when determining whether adjusting the inspection date is justified. Generally speaking, if HUD determines that it will be able to conduct an inspection at the property in a safe manner, the inspection will proceed as scheduled.

6. What is the process for deciding whether to cancel or defer an inspection due to COVID-19?

Response: HUD follows a five-step process in making its determination as to whether the scheduled REAC inspection should proceed:

Step 1: The assigned REAC inspector will reach out to the property to schedule an inspection at least 28 days in advance and offering a date for inspection. If the POA determines this date is not suitable, an alternative date within five days of the original proposal will be offered. Once the date is set, the inspector issues the 28-day notification to the property with the inspection date.

Step 2: The POA should raise any COVID-19 related concerns at the 14- or 2-day protocol-based check-ins for discussion as to whether a deferral or cancellation is

appropriate. REAC will work with the property and inspector to facilitate schedule adjustments as necessary.

Step 3: As part of the evaluation process, REAC will coordinate with MF leadership to ensure it evaluates all relevant factors.

Step 4: On the day of the inspection, the inspector is required to report to the TAC any known cases of COVID-19 at the property.

Step 5: REAC TAC reviews the reported COVID-19 cases at the property and documents the units and buildings affected. Based on this information, REAC TAC coordinates with the property and inspector if additional discussions are warranted.