

Condo Smarts

Headline: What's your COVID policy

Topic: Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Publication / Date: The Province, Aug 27, 2020

Written by: Tony Gioventu

Dear Tony: Can a strata corporation adopt bylaws for the common property that establishes behaviour patterns that are beyond nuisance or normal circumstances? Our strata corporation held an information meeting a week ago regarding the use of our facilities to determine what measures we can take to enable the opening of our club house and outdoor pool. The strata council has held a position of keeping everything closed, but our residents and their guests and contractors walk through our lobby, common areas and use our elevators daily, so why would the use of our common facilities be a higher risk than the transient use of our common areas? Do you have examples of how other strata corporations are managing this situation?

DK Wilson Kelowna

Dear DK: British Columbia hosts a broad variety of strata corporations by location, design, size and density. For this reason, every strata council and community will need to assess what is the best solution for the health and safety of its residents. Best practices don't necessarily demand the closure of our facilities or require us to cease general operations, but they do require us to critically assess the risks of exposure that may arise from access to common areas and facilities.

Before your strata corporation opens your common facilities to users, develop management protocols for contact tracing, cleaning and sanitization schedules, and a community response in the event there is a COVID-19 outbreak in your strata corporation. You are correct, the risks of exposure may be higher from transient users of our properties than the collective residents safely using common facilities. It is possible to safely manage the use of pools, gyms, recreation rooms, guest suites, libraries, terraces, gardens and interactive common use areas, but it requires a collective investment by the community, close monitoring to ensure the protocols are observed, and a focus on the best interest of safety of all residents.

Before you consider opening your facilities, walk through the spaces and observe all the potential contact locations where the virus may be spread and locations where social distancing may not be possible. These will be your target areas to manage use of space, sanitization, or perhaps closures to avoid higher risks. Set down a written policy on janitorial functions and sanitization. When will the areas be cleaned, who will clean them and what frequency will products be applied? Distribute and install hand sanitizer stations around your common areas. Consider a mask policy for the protection of everyone in your community. Social distancing is realistically not effective in elevators or in most common area corridors, and follow the public health officer's lead on social distancing and mask applications for public spaces. Strata corporation common areas after all are the public spaces of your community. The recommendations are for the collective protection of all residents.

A strata council may adopt new rules during the year, and the options around the use of common facilities and requirements such as social distancing, use of masks and regulations on access to common amenities can be included in those rules. The intention is not to create an enforcement model but to ensure everyone in your community is well informed with the same information. Print new policies and rules, distribute them to all owners and tenants and post them in obvious locations. If you establish new rules, review your existing rules and bylaws first to confirm you are not imposing contrary conditions and remember rules do not apply to strata lots. To assist your community, CHOA has posted sample guides for mask policies, how to respond if there is an outbreak in your community and a pool management policy. Go at www.choa.bc.ca under the Covid-19 Banner.