

# HABC RESPONDS

## COVID-19 ANSWERS TO YOUR FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Learn more about COVID-19 at [www.coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov](http://www.coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov)

May 7, 2020

### Updated Answers to Residents' Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Original Release: April 8, 2020

Updated: May 7, 2020

To HABC Residents:

As the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) continues to closely monitor developments related to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, your safety and the safety of our employees remain our top priority. We appreciate your continued patience and cooperation as we work through these challenging times. We are sending this document to provide updated answers to some of the questions you may have and additional information about your rent payment obligations provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the enclosed HUD flyer. In addition, we are also providing you information regarding HUD waivers of certain requirements during the pandemic that HABC has adopted, as discussed in answer to question 16 below.

**QUESTION 1:** Am I required to pay rent during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**ANSWER:** Yes, rent is still due during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**QUESTION 2:** Can I be evicted during the COVID-19 pandemic if I do not pay rent?

**ANSWER:** As stated in the enclosed HUD flyer, there is a temporary suspension of evictions **for nonpayment of rent** until July 24, 2020.

The HUD flyer states that eviction actions for nonpayment of rent filed with the court before March 27, 2020 can proceed if allowed by State law. However, the Governor of Maryland also has an Order in place suspending evictions during the pandemic. Therefore, HABC will not proceed with any eviction for nonpayment of rent until it is permitted by both HUD and the Governor of Maryland. Appropriate notice will be given to HABC residents when evictions resume.

Please be aware that any rent due during the pandemic will not go away and will continue to accumulate (build up) if it is not paid. Please contact your management office if you are having difficulty paying your rent or need a rent adjustment due to loss of income.

(Other evictions for material lease violations such as criminal activity can proceed.)

**QUESTION 3:** The HUD flyer also talks about voucher participants. What is a voucher participant?

**ANSWER:** A voucher participant is an individual who has a voucher under HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Program (also known as the Section 8 program) and has a lease with a private landlord. Voucher participants do not have a lease with HABC. The HUD flyer is meant for both public housing residents and individuals in the Section 8 program.

**QUESTION 4:** What should I do if I try to make a rent payment and the walk-in retail payment location is closed?

**ANSWER:** Please contact the Payment Vision/Fidelity Express Consumer Care Department at **1-800-621-8030 ext. 7030** before going out, to see which locations are open.

In addition to one of the walk-in retail payment locations, HABC encourages residents to make rent payments by one of these methods without having to leave their home:

- a. You can pay online through Payment Vision/Fidelity Express at [www.payhabc.com](http://www.payhabc.com); or
- b. You can pay by phone through Payment Vision/Fidelity Express by calling **1-410-989-5587**; or
- c. You can pay by signing up with **HABC for Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)** which allows your rent payment to be deducted electronically from your bank account. The form to sign up for electronic rent payments through EFT was attached to the FAQs dated April 8, 2020 sent to you. You can complete the form and drop it off in the “door drop-box” at your Management Office. Call your Management Office ahead of time before dropping it off. If you no longer have the form, please contact your Management Office.

HABC will waive the payment fee normally charged by Payment Vision/Fidelity Express for rent payments made after the 5th day of the month for all valid payments made during the month of April and May 2020. If you are still charged the fee when you make a payment, please contact your Management Office by phone to report this charge. Keep a copy of your receipt.

If you are having difficulty paying through any of the above methods, please contact your Property Management Office by phone.

Remember: DO NOT PUT PAYMENTS IN THE “DOOR DROP-BOX” AT YOUR PROPERTY MANAGEMENT OFFICE.

**QUESTION 5:** What should I do if I do not have a credit card, debit card or electronic check (EFT) to make my rent payment?

**ANSWER:** You may purchase a pre-paid debit card or a gift card at most convenience stores, grocery stores or Walmart. You can then use the card to pay your rent over the phone at **1-410-989-5587** or online at [www.payhabc.com](http://www.payhabc.com). *HABC will waive the transaction fee imposed by Payment Vision/Fidelity Express for all valid payments made during the month of April and May 2020, and credit back the activation fee for the prepaid debit card or gift card if you provide HABC with a valid receipt of the date you purchased the gift card you used to pay.*

Remember to observe the Governor’s Stay-at-Home Order. You may consider purchasing a prepaid debit card or gift card when leaving your house for other essential activities, such as purchasing groceries.

**QUESTION 6:** Am I still required to recertify since the Property Management Office is closed?

**ANSWER:** Yes. If you are scheduled for your regular recertification, you will receive a packet through the U.S. Postal Service that contains documents that must be filled out by you and your adult family

members. After you complete the documents, place them in the envelope included in the package and deposit the envelope in the Management Office's "door drop-box". Your documents should be safe in that box and will be retrieved by Property Management staff to be processed. Please make sure you provide the best telephone number for HABC staff to reach you. Someone from your Management Office will contact you to conduct the recertification interview over the telephone, which will include a review of the annual recertification Reasonable Accommodation Information Form. As explained in answer to question 16 below, HABC will accept a temporary "self-certification" (sworn written statement in a form provided by HABC) by residents to verify changes in income, so that there will not be a delay in completing the recertification.

**QUESTION 7:** If I lose my job or my work hours are cut, how do I request an interim recertification to reduce my rent?

**ANSWER:** You should contact your Management Office by telephone if you or someone in your household experiences a loss of income. The Management Office will send you the documents you need to complete for an interim recertification in the same manner described above for regular recertifications. HABC will accept a self-certification from you about your loss of income and the form will be enclosed. HABC will need to verify the information you provide, so you should provide the best telephone number to reach you, the name and telephone number of your employer(s) or the household member's employer(s), last date of employment (or date of reduced hours or furlough). The verification process can be done by HABC at a later time so as not to delay processing your adjustment.

**QUESTION 8:** If I receive a Coronavirus stimulus check from the government will it be counted as income in calculating my rent?

**ANSWER:** No. Coronavirus stimulus checks from the government will not be counted as income.

**QUESTION 9:** If I move out, how do I return my apartment keys?

**ANSWER:** If you have already submitted an "Intent to Vacate Notice" you must contact the management office before you move out for information on how move outs and inspecting the conditions of your unit will be handled. They will arrange with you how the keys will be returned.

If you have not submitted an "Intent to Vacate Notice", please contact your management office and arrangements will be made on how the move out will be handled.

Remember: If you move out, you can only reapply for housing when the waiting list is opened again.

**QUESTION 10:** What should I do if I have a maintenance emergency in my apartment?

**ANSWER:** All maintenance calls are being answered by the after-hours answering service (during business and after business hours). The answering service will contact the Maintenance Supervisor on call. The Supervisor on call will contact you to obtain additional information that may be needed to address the Emergency Work Order request. During COVID-19, Maintenance Technicians will only be responding to emergency calls. Emergency calls are defined as: *No Heat, No Water, No Hot Water, No Gas, No Electricity, Sewer Back up, Non-Working Appliances, Major Flood, Pipe Burst, or Security Issues*. While the technician is in your home, you will be required to remain in a separate room for social distancing purposes and the technician will also take additional safety/cleaning measures.

**QUESTION 11:** What kind of safety measures am I expected to see if a HABC staff person enters my unit to respond to a request for emergency work?

**ANSWER:** When the HABC staff person calls you to confirm the details of the emergency and at the time of entry to your unit, he/she will ask if anyone in the household is sick. For the health and safety of you, your family, the HABC repair person, and the community, we are asking that everyone in your home stays in another room while the staff is performing the repair. The technician will wear additional personal protective equipment (PPE) and will thoroughly wipe down surfaces in and around the workspace. Verbal verification of completion will be obtained as opposed to written signatures.

**QUESTION 12:** Where can I go if I need assistance in obtaining food?

**ANSWER:** The City of Baltimore maintains an interactive map of all food distribution locations. Below is the link to the City's map of the food distribution locations:

<https://baltimore.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Nearby/index.html?appid=32ce54bc99e746f5bc4c386208cee3e7>

Home delivered meals for Seniors can be arranged through the Maryland Access Point hotline by calling (410)-396-2273.

**QUESTION 13:** Are there any other services that can help me if I need food or medicine?

**ANSWER:** Yes. Call 2-1-1 or visit [www.coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov](http://www.coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov) for resources. For information regarding making donations to HABC properties, please call 3-1-1. (Also see the answer to question 15 below.)

**QUESTION 14:** What do I do if I believe I have bed bugs, or rodents in my unit?

**ANSWER:** If you suspect that you have bed bugs or rodents, please call 443-984-1774 and leave a message with your name, best telephone number to contact you. A member of the extermination staff will call you back on the next business day to discuss your concerns. Should your unit need treatment, you will receive a notice letting you know when the exterminator will be treating and inspecting your unit. The same social distancing mentioned above should be practice at the time of the visit.

**QUESTION 15:** If I have (or a member of my household has) a disability and I need a reasonable accommodation because of my (or my household member's) disability how do I submit that request?

**ANSWER:** You may submit your reasonable accommodation request in the "door drop box" at your Management Office using the Request for a Reasonable Accommodation form sent with the April 8, 2020 FAQ's document. Please fill out the Request for a Reasonable Accommodation form and place the date of the request on the form and place it in an envelope. If you need assistance with completing the form, or you no longer have the form, please call HABC's Fair Housing Office at 410-396-4247 and leave a message and a phone number where you can be reached. Someone from the Fair Housing Office will return your call. Because of the social distancing and stay at home restrictions currently in place to address COVID-19, HABC staff are not able to observe whether you have an obvious disability. Therefore, a disability verification form to be completed by your

healthcare professional was also attached to the April 8, 2020 FAQ’s document. If you need assistance with sending the disability verification form to your healthcare provider, or you no longer have the form, please call the Fair Housing Office at 410-396-4247. The healthcare professional may be a nurse practitioner, nurse, physician’s assistant, licensed social worker, physician, psychologist, or case worker who knows the nature of your disability and can explain how your requested accommodation will address your disability. Your reasonable accommodation request will be processed in accordance with HABC’s Reasonable Accommodation Policy and Procedures. While the COVID-19 stay at home and social distancing requirements are in place, HABC staff are meeting with residents via telephone instead of conducting home visits.

**QUESTION 16:** What are HUD waivers and why do I need to know about them?

**ANSWER:** HUD is the federal agency that provides the money to run the public housing program. HUD sets the rules and regulations for the program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, HUD waivers are accommodations that HUD made to allow public housing authorities to make certain changes to their policies that will help them to continue to carry out HUD’s important mission of providing affordable housing for low-income families. HUD allowed public housing authorities to choose which of the HUD waivers they want to adopt. Housing authorities must then notify their residents of the HUD waivers they adopted because the waivers may affect the way the public housing authority reviews residents’ occupancy requirements. The five HUD waivers listed below were adopted by HABC and went into effect on April 10, 2020. For more information, you may contact your Property Management Office.

	Description	Summary of Alternative Requirements	Availability Period End Date
1.	Delay in Processing Regular Reexaminations	All regular reexaminations due between May 2020 and December 2020 will be due before December 31, 2020. This means that while HABC will continue processing recertifications as discussed in Question 6 above, HABC will have until December 31, 2020 to complete all recertification due.	12/31/2020
2.	Required Income Verification	HABC will temporarily accept resident’s “self-certification” (sworn written statement) to verify changes in income, so that there will not be a delay in completing a recertification.  NOTE: By 7/31/2020, HABC will use the regular verification methods to verify the information provided by a resident in a self-certification and will address any discrepancies in the self-certification by processing an interim reexamination.	7/31/2020
3.	Revisions to the Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP)	If necessary, HABC can make reasonable changes to its ACOP and then request approval of the changes by HABC’s Board of Commissioners between June 30, 2020 and July 31, 2020.	7/31/2020

4.	Reporting Compliance with Community Service and Self-Sufficient Requirement (CSSR)	HABC residents who are required to perform community service or self-sufficiency activity (CSSR) and report their compliance with this requirement may report “pending” at their next regular reexaminations, if scheduled between May 2020 and March 2021. For all regular reexaminations after March 2021, the CSSR requirement will become effective again.	3/31/2021
5.	Public Housing Over-Income Families	Any public housing family that is over the income limits for residing in public housing may continue to reside in their public housing unit and continue to pay the same rent until their next scheduled regular reexamination.	12/31/2020

Attachments: HUD Tenant Flyer

\*\*\*\*\* Remember: Social Distancing Always - Let's work together to maintain a 6-ft distance from each other in all areas of HABC communities during this Covid-19 pandemic. \*\*\*\*\*