

New tenant checklist

What you must know before you sign a lease

At the start of every tenancy, your landlord or agent should give you:

- a copy of this information (the *New tenant checklist*)
- a copy of your lease (tenancy agreement)
- 2 copies of the premises condition report (more on that later)
- an invitation to lodge the bond using Rental Bonds Online (RBO). Or, if you are unable to use RBO, a bond lodgement form for you to sign, so that it can be lodged with NSW Fair Trading
- keys to your new home.

If applicable, you should also receive:

- a certificate of compliance for a swimming pool (more on that later)
- a copy of the by-laws, if the property is in a strata complex
- notification if the premises has been listed on the Loose-Fill Asbestos Insulation Register (more on that later)
- notification of any other material fact relating to the premises (more on that later).

Before you sign the lease, make sure you read it thoroughly. If there is anything in the lease that you do not understand, ask questions.

Remember, you are committing to a legally binding contract with no cooling-off period. You want to be certain you understand and agree to what you are signing.

You should only sign the lease when you can answer Yes to the following statements.

The lease

- I have read the lease and asked questions if there were things I did not understand.
- I know the length of the lease is negotiated before I sign, which means it can be for 6 months, 12 months, or some other period.

- I know that I must be offered at least **one** way to pay the rent that does not involve paying a fee to a third party.
- I know that any additional terms to the lease must be negotiated before I sign.
- I have checked that all additional terms to the lease are legal. For example, the lease does **not** include a term requiring me to have the carpet professionally cleaned when I leave, unless I have agreed to that as part of a condition to allow me to keep a pet on the premises.

Promised repairs

For any promises made by the landlord or agent (for example, replace the oven, paint a room, clean up the backyard, etc.):

- I have made sure these have already been done
- or
- I have an undertaking in writing (before signing the lease) that they will be done.

Upfront costs

I am **not** being required to pay:

- more than 2 weeks rent in advance, unless I freely offer to pay more
- more than 4 weeks rent as a rental bond.

I am **not** being charged for:

- the cost of preparing my lease
- the initial supply of keys and security devices to each tenant named on the lease.

Managing your bond online

Your landlord or agent **must** give you the option to use Rental Bonds Online (RBO) to pay your bond. You can use RBO to securely pay your bond direct to NSW Fair Trading using a credit card or BPAY, without the need to fill out and sign a bond lodgement form. Once registered, you can continue to use your RBO account for future tenancies.

If you decide not to use RBO, you can ask your agent or landlord for a paper bond lodgement form for you to sign, so that it can be lodged with NSW Fair Trading.

Swimming and spa pools

Does the property have a swimming or spa pool? If so, the landlord or agent must give you a copy of a valid certificate of compliance or occupation certificate issued in the past 3 years. This does not apply if you are renting in a strata or community scheme of more than 2 lots.

Property containing loose-fill asbestos insulation

Properties in NSW that test positive for loose-fill asbestos insulation will have the property address included in a public register (available on the NSW Fair Trading website). If a property has been listed on this public register, the agent or private landlord must disclose this information to new tenants. The following section lists the other information that must be provided to tenants before they sign a lease.

What tenants must be told

Sometimes a residential property has something in its history that you should know. If the landlord or agent is aware of any of the following facts, they must inform you:

- if the property:
 - has been affected by flooding or bushfire in the previous 5 years
 - has significant health or safety risks (unless they are obvious when you inspect the property)
 - has been the scene of a violent crime in the previous 5 years
- is affected by zoning or laws that will not allow you to obtain a parking permit and only paid parking is available in the area
- is provided with council waste services on a different basis to other premises in the area
- is listed on the loose-fill asbestos insulation register
- if other people are entitled to share the driveway or walkway.

After you move in

- Fill in your part of the condition report and make sure you return a copy to the landlord or agent within 7 days. This is an important piece of evidence. If you do not take the time to complete it accurately, money could be taken out of your bond to pay for damage that was already there when you moved in.
- If you lodged the bond using RBO, make sure you receive an email or SMS notification from Fair Trading confirming your bond has been received. If the bond was not lodged using RBO, make sure you get a letter from Fair Trading sometime during the first 2 months saying that your bond has been received and advising you of your Rental Bond Number.

If you do not receive an email, SMS notification or letter, call NSW Fair Trading to make sure the bond has been lodged.

Top tips for problem-free renting

Follow these useful tips to help avoid problems while you are renting:

- Photos are a great way to record the condition of the property when you first move in. Take date-stamped photos of the property, especially areas that are damaged or unclean. Keep these photos in case the landlord objects to returning your bond at the end of your tenancy.
- Keep a copy of your lease, condition report, rent receipts, Rental Bond Number and copies of letters/emails you send or receive in a safe place where you can easily find it later.

- Never stop paying your rent, even if the landlord is not complying with their side of the agreement (e.g. by failing to do repairs). You could end up being evicted if you do.
- Comply with the terms of your lease. In particular, never make any alterations, keep a pet or let other people move in without asking the landlord or agent for permission first.
- Keep a diary of your dealings with the landlord or agent - record all the times and dates of conversations, who you spoke to and what they agreed to do. If repairs are needed, put your request in writing to the landlord or agent and keep a copy. This type of evidence is very helpful if a dispute arises that ends up in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT).
- Consider taking out home contents insurance. It will cover your belongings in case of theft, fires and natural disasters. The landlord's building insurance, if they have it, will not cover your things.
- If the property has a pool or garden, be clear about what the landlord or agent expects you to do to maintain them.
- Be careful with what you sign relating to your tenancy and do not let anybody rush you. Never sign a blank form, such as a 'Claim for refund of bond' form.
- If you are happy in the place and your lease ends, consider asking for the lease to be renewed for another fixed term. This will remove the worry about being unexpectedly asked to leave and can help to lock in the rent for the next period of time.

www.tenants.org.au for details of your nearest service or check your local phone directory.

Landlords and agents must give a copy of this information statement to all new tenants before they sign a residential lease. Fines can be imposed if this is not done.

Further information

Go to the Fair Trading website or call 13 32 20 for more information about your renting rights and responsibilities.

The NSW Government funds a range of community based Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services across NSW to provide advice, information and advocacy to tenants. Go to the Tenants Union website at