

Get the Facts: HOPWA and COVID-19 Response



REMOTE INSPECTIONS Q&A

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development HUD has issued two memoranda providing regulatory waivers of certain Housing for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) requirements to help with the nation's response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. One of these waivers is for **HOPWA – Property Standards**.

Grantees wishing to utilize any of the waivers provided in these memoranda should notify their local CPD Director, by email, of their intent to utilize a specific waiver flexibility **two days** before they anticipate using the waiver flexibility. Grantees should communicate the use of waivers to their Project Sponsors.

Note to Project Sponsors: Only Grantees can make the determination to use this waiver. If they have questions about this, then they should ask their Grantee.

Does the waiver on property standards...apply to both initial and annual unit inspections?

The waiver language only refers to initial unit inspections conducted prior to placing HOPWA-eligible households in a unit. Annual unit re-inspections may be delayed based on grantee policies until COVID-19 safety issues are no longer a concern. Grantees may use remote methods for annual re-inspections, if desired.

What is required for initial unit inspections based on the waiver?

For a 1-year period beginning on the date of the waiver memo (4/1/2020 for TBRA or 5/22/2020 for all other PH assistance), HOPWA grantees and project sponsors may delay in-person, on-site inspection of units for HQS normally required prior to providing TBRA assistance to HOPWA-eligible households (24 CFR 574.310(b)). In order to utilize this waiver, grantees and project sponsors must meet the following criteria:

1. The recipient is able to visually inspect the unit using technology, such as video streaming, to ensure the unit meets HQS before any assistance is provided; and
2. The recipient or subrecipient has written policies to physically reinspect the unit after the health officials determine special measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are no longer necessary.

Can grantees/project sponsors postpone annual housing re-inspections due to COVID-19?

Yes, grantees may postpone regular annual housing inspections due to COVID-19 health and safety concerns for their clients, staff and property owners. Annual re-inspections may continue, utilizing remote methods, if desired; however, this is not required.

Grantees should put a policy in place that addresses postponement of annual inspections due to COVID-19 health and safety concerns, detailing how delays can be approved, when inspections should resume and explaining when and how the policy will be consistently implemented.

If we do not conduct annual inspections during this period, are there other ways to ensure that units are safe?

Yes, programs are encouraged to be creative in finding ways to check on clients and client housing conditions. Some suggestions include:

- Check in with clients about their unit conditions using a simple Habitability checklist
- Ask clients to test smoke detectors
- If conducting case management by phone, ask the client to FaceTime (if available) or take pictures of any problem areas
- Note any unit concerns in the case record; relay any safety concerns to the LL
- Make sure clients know they can call you with concerns about the unit even though inspections are delayed

If we are delaying unit re-inspections, can we also delay annual client recertifications?

No, **annual and interim recertifications should continue**, as usual, using remote methods. These are normal ongoing functions for rental assistance and may be even more important during this time when client income may be negatively impacted by income fluctuations and losses. To the greatest extent possible, programs should ensure that income losses in eligible households are taken into account through interim recertifications that allow for timely adjustment of the client rent portion.

Remember that self-certification of income can apply to recerts and the use of self-certification requires the waiver notification process!

What methods are acceptable for remote inspections?

Some suggested methods can include:

- Video streaming (such as FaceTime)
- Video recordings
- Time/date-stamped photographs

What should be covered?

- Show all areas of the unit
- Include a visual and audio (if possible) of smoke detectors
- Visual paint inspection when applicable

The on-site person doing videos (or other methods) could include:

- Client or other household member
- Client caretaker
- Landlord or property manager
- Others as determined by the program/circumstances

Program staff give directions and use results to complete a "provisional" inspection:

Program staff should let the on-site person know what needs to be recorded, shown or photographed, then review the results and complete an inspection form for the record. Some new recommendations include that videos/pictures should be deleted afterwards and the inspection classified as "provisional", since you will need to re-inspect on-site at a later date.

The contents of this fact sheet reflect guidance presented in a series of HOPWA/COVID-19 Q&A webinars available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hopwa/covid-19/#webinars>