

# A real estate agent's guide to weathering the Covid-19 storm

The current outbreak of Covid-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern and, for now, most people in South Africa do not have an immediate risk of exposure to the virus.



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However, as we have seen happen in other countries, the situation can rapidly evolve, with Level 3 travel warnings now in place for China, South Korea, Italy, and Iran, and a Level 2 Travel Warning for Japan whilst the number of confirmed cases in other countries like the UK has spiked in recent weeks.

“We have seen how the virus has impacted every factor of life in countries where there are high infection rates, with many industries virtually at a standstill.” says Yael Geffen, CEO of Lew Geffen Sotheby’s International Realty.

“In real estate, agents deal with the public on a daily basis, meeting many new people in any given week so it’s essential that we all put precautionary steps in place now while infection rates in SA are still low - for our own protection as well as our clients.

“It’s therefore vitally important to educate ourselves and our teams about the scientific facts from official sources rather relying on hyperbole and media hysteria.

“Equally important is to remain calm and not become fearful or panic-stricken, not least because stress can dampen your immune response, making you more vulnerable to contracting viruses.”

Geffen suggests the following steps to consider implementing in offices:

- **Alternative communication** - If you or clients are sick, rather arrange a zoom/facetime/Whatsapp video/Microsoft teams call. We are fortunate to be living in an age of digital technology which enables us to effectively replace face to face communication if necessary.
- **Health notice** - Ask your teams to sanitise hands upon every entry to the premises – even if they’ve just popped out for a minute to buy a sandwich or have a puff.
- **Work remotely** – If you’re comfortable with your staff working remotely, suggest they do that – especially if someone in their household is sick.
- **Digitise** - There are now many apps for digital signatures which allow you to sign legal documents remotely. But it’s best to use trusted software providers as they add an additional level of security by providing authentication and audit logs, among other features. The most popular are: PanaDoc, DocuSign, Adobe Sign and HelloSign.
- **Sharing is not caring** - If you feel sick don’t be a hero – your colleagues would rather have you home than possibly infectious in the office. See a doctor soonest and please keep them apprised of your situation.

However, as most of an agent’s work is conducted away from the office, and in other people’s homes and public places where they meet new people daily, further precautions are necessary.

### Further safety precautions

Geffen suggests the following which will protect both agents and clients without putting a damper on business as usual.

- **Plan ahead to feel more in control** - Be prepared for disruptions such as and meeting or event cancellations school closings and have contingency plans in place.
- **Carry your own sanitizer at all times** – As sanitizer stocks are low at the moment, keep wet wipes handy and consider making your own. Two effective options are diluting Clean Green with water in a small bottle that easily fits in a handbag or school case and another cheap and easy alternative is diluted vinegar in a spray bottle.
- **Avoid physical contact** – This is easier said than done as there is no better way to convey our sincere pleasure when greeting new clients or congratulating them on a great deal than with a hearty handshake. To many of us it would seem rude, but remember that at the moment refraining from doing so actually conveys respect.
- **Show day etiquette** – Show days are key to our business, so don’t just cancel them. Have a large bottle of waterless hand sanitizer at the entrance with a notice requesting all visitors use it. And rather than forego the information gained from clients signing show day registers, supply a box of cheap pens or pencils that they can take with them after signing.
- **No, it’s not rude to ask personal questions** – If you are meeting a client whom you know travels abroad regularly,

you may ask them about their recent trips, and particularly if they've been to areas identified as having an increased risk of coronavirus.

- **Drive solo** – If you typically drive your clients to viewing, rather go in separate cars and meet them at the property.

Geffen believes that we cannot take care of our families unless we take good care of ourselves, and these precautions will reduce the risk of infection at home and in our communities, even further:

- **Avoid densely populated public spaces** – It may often be inconvenient but rather safe than sorry. Going to the gym right now may not be the best idea especially at peak times; try and work out outside instead by walking, running or biking.
- **Elbows up** – Whilst we all know that it's polite to cover our mouths when coughing or sneezing, and usually do, we must take extra care to do so, preferably with our elbows rather than hands.
- **Avoid air travel** – It may not always be possible, but if you can, postpone trips until further notice.
- **Boost your immune system** – Make sure you and your family eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and it might be wise to invest in a good supplement with immune-boosting minerals and vitamins. Getting enough sleep is also essential for warding off infections of all kinds.

"The fact is more than 80% of Covid-19 infections are akin to a cold or mild flu and most patients recover quickly," concludes Geffen, "but those with chronic illnesses and compromised immune systems are very vulnerable.

"It's also a very contagious virus and as panic has risen, so has its impact on businesses and even national economies and right now South Africa cannot afford any more economic knocks.

"If we all begin taking a few very simple precautions from the get-go, we can significantly reduce the risk of infection and the spread of the virus and thereby minimise the impact on our lives and businesses."

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