

Navigating your lease in COVID-19: FAQs for Off Campus Students

This FAQ is meant to provide simple answers to complex questions, and to direct you to resources you can use to find more information. Please reach out to Off Campus Student Life if you have further questions.

I no longer need my off campus apartment. How can I break my lease?

First, read your full lease, paying particular attention to any clauses that pertain to early termination, including any fees you may be charged should you end your lease early. You will likely continue to owe monthly rent to your landlord through the original end date, or until your landlord rents the unit to someone else, whichever occurs first. Your landlord is obligated to make reasonable efforts to re-rent the apartment, though the emergence of COVID-19 may make that difficult. Communicate with your landlord if you would like to end your lease early. Explain your situation and ask them to work with you in finding a solution that works for both of you. For more information, submit a [Request for Services](#) to the Student Legal Services Office and watch the presentation on --[Ending Your Lease Early in the Time of COVID-19](#).

Can I postpone the start of my lease?

It depends on the terms of your particular lease. First, read your full lease, paying particular attention to any clauses that pertain to changing or postponing the term of the lease. A lease is a contract—after it is signed it can only be amended with the consent of all parties. Absent some agreement with your landlord to the contrary, you will likely owe monthly rent according to the schedule you originally agreed to, regardless of whether you move in, and even if you never pick up the keys. Communicate with your landlord if you would like to change the start date of your lease. Explain your situation and ask them to work with you in finding a solution that works for both of you. If your landlord is unwilling to push back the start of the lease, consider subletting the unit. You can post an advertisement seeking someone to sublet your unit using the [Off Campus Housing Service](#) and can find a template sublease agreement on its [Resource page](#).

Due to COVID-19 I am no longer able to pay my rent. What should I do?

The only lawful way for a landlord in MA to evict a tenant, is to file a complaint in court requesting that a judge order a tenant to leave. It is illegal in MA for a landlord to engage in “self-help” eviction, such as changing the locks or moving a tenant’s belongings out of the property without a judicial order, even if the tenant has not paid their rent. In response to COVID-19, the MA Legislature enacted a [temporary Eviction Moratorium](#). This moratorium temporarily restricts the ability of landlords in MA to file eviction complaints in court (except in some limited circumstances where a risk to health and safety is a factor).



(Continued) I am no longer able to pay my rent. What should I do?

It also restricts their ability to even give notice to tenants that they want them to move out. The moratorium does not include rent relief; this means that you will continue to owe rent to your landlord even if you can't pay it right now. Communicate with your landlord if you are having trouble paying your rent. Explain your situation and ask them to work with you in finding a solution that works for both of you, e.g., creating a payment plan. For more information, submit a [Request for Services](#) to the Student Legal Services Office and watch their presentation—[The MA Eviction Moratorium: What It Means For Students](#). Additionally, if you are struggling to meet basic needs, even during the summer, contact the [Dean of Student's Office for assistance](#).

I want to end my lease, but my roommate wants to stay. What are my options? It depends. If you and your landlord are the only parties to the lease (e.g., you are only renting a room), it should be possible for you to work with your landlord to end your lease early without having an adverse effect on your roommates. If you and your roommates are all parties to the same lease, your obligations under that lease are likely joint and several—meaning that even if one or more of you moves out, the landlord will continue to expect the same amount of rent be paid to them monthly. Your moving out early, therefore, could have an adverse effect on your roommates, such as raising the amount of rent they are each expected to pay. Consider what agreements you made with your roommates, especially with respect to the intended length of your living in the unit, and the amount of rent you agreed to pay. Work with them to mitigate the harm your leaving early will cause, including subletting your room or having another person replace you on the lease (also known as a “lease transfer” or “assignment”). You can post an advertisement seeking someone to sublet or take your place on the lease on the [Off Campus Housing Service](#), and can find a template sublease agreement on our [Resource page](#).

My lease ends before I can return to campus. What should I do?

First, read your full lease, paying particular attention to clauses describing what actions the landlord can/will take should you fail to vacate fully when your lease ends, including any fees that may be charged (e.g., court costs, attorney's fees, disposal fees). Communicate with your landlord if you are not going to be able to fully vacate your apartment when your lease ends. Explain your situation and ask them to work with you in finding a solution that works for both of you, e.g., pro-rated rent for each day you or your possessions continue to occupy the space. If your landlord is unable to work with you, look into packing/moving alternatives that don't require you to be present—e.g., a trusted friend or a professional mover. Below is a list of storage facilities and movers that service the Amherst area. Please note these companies have not been vetted and are not endorsed by UMass Amherst.



Storage facilities

Amherst Self Storage
Stadium Storage
Sugarloaf Self Storage
Snow's Self Storage
Stuff-It Storage

Moving Companies

Sitterly Movers
Ideal Movers
Five College Movers
Dorm Room Movers
Jimmy Burgoff Moving & Hauling

When should I be looking for an apartment for Fall 2020?

When you are ready; that is, when you feel you have sufficient information to sign a contract that includes a significant financial obligation. While it is true that the sooner you start your search, the more options you will have, it is important to balance your eagerness to secure future housing with the uncertainty of the type of learning the University will offer in Fall 2020—remote, in-person, or some combination of the two. **And remember that there is not a shortage of rental housing in Amherst.** When you do begin your search, be sure to take both cost and risk into account. This includes measuring what you will owe by considering the cost of renting the unit for the full term, which, absent some agreement to the contrary, you will be promising to pay regardless of the University's status. Communicate with your prospective landlord. Explain your situation to them, including your uncertainty about the need to be in Amherst for Fall 2020, and try to negotiate a contingency clause that explicitly states what will happen with respect to the lease if the University only offers remote learning in Fall 2020 (e.g., a buyout clause, flexible lease term, or reduction in rent). Begin your search for housing on the [Off Campus Housing Service](#), which includes a number of search tools to individualize your search.

Have more questions?

Check out our websites,
www.umass.edu/offcampuslife
and www.umass.edu/slo for
more information, or email us
at ocsc@sacl.umass.edu and
slo@umass.edu

