



Private Sector Housing Hazard Fact Sheet

FALLING ON STAIRS



Who we are and what we do:

Private Sector Housing are responsible for making sure that properties both owner occupied and privately rented comply with Housing law and standards to protect customers from hazards of poor housing.

To achieve this we will assess dwellings under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to evaluate any potential risks to health and safety from any deficiencies found. The more common hazards that we come across in dwellings are damp and mould growth; excess cold; crowding and space; entry by intruders; personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage; falling on the level; **falling on stairs**; falling between levels; fire; and structural collapse and falling elements. If significant hazards are identified in privately rented properties which are attributable to the condition of the property, then we may require remedial action by landlords to reduce or eliminate the risk from these hazards.

The intention of our fact sheets is to help you understand what we are looking for, and where possible, to identify areas where landlords and tenants may be able to help minimise or reduce risk.

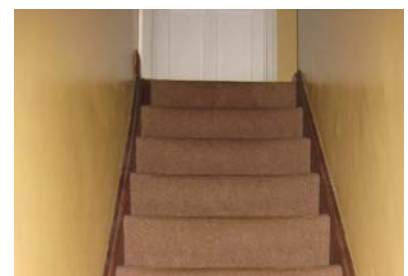
This fact sheet covers any fall associated with stairs, steps and ramps where the change in level is greater than 300mm. This may include internal stairs within the dwelling and external steps or ramps within the curtilage of the dwelling.

Falls on stairs account for around a quarter of all falls in the home. Although fewer falls occur on stairs than on the level, stair falls are much more likely to lead to a more serious injury or even death. Any fall can result in physical injury, such as bruising, fractures, head, brain and spinal injuries. The nature and severity of an injury is dependent on the distance of a fall, and the nature of the surface(s) collided with, as well as on the age and fragility of the person.

Causes of falls on stairs

Accidents are nearly twice as likely on stairs consisting of straight steps with no winders or immediate landings and where the pitch of the stairs is more than 42°.

The shape and dimension of nosings may increase the risk of a fall. In particular, nosings that project more than 18mm leading to missteps. Poor frictional quality of the surface of stair treads and particularly of nosings can also increase slips and missteps.



An accident is more likely to occur on stairs without carpet covering, and those with no handrails of guardrails. A fall and injury is also more likely as a result of a fall on uncovered external steps which may become icy or wet, or uneven and badly maintained.

The risk of a fall is doubled if there is no wall or guarding to one side of the stairs. Similarly, the lack of any handrail doubles the likelihood of a fall, even if there is a wall both sides of the stairs.

What preventative measures can landlords and home owners take?

Ensure that the treads, risers, nosings, balustrades, and handrails are complete and in good condition. Ensure that concrete steps are free draining to reduce icing.

Provide handrails to give assistance in ascent and descent, and offer a handhold if there is a misstep to help prevent a fall. Handrails to both sides of the stairs provide the safest arrangement but a continuous handrail to one side of the flight of stairs is far better than none. Handrails should be sited and shaped so that they are easy to grasp and extend the full length of the flight.

Where there is no wall to one or both sides of the stairs, guarding (e.g. balustrade) should be provided to prevent falls off the sides of stairs. It should be designed and constructed so as to discourage children climbing. To reduce the risk of small children falling or becoming trapped, there should not be any openings on stairs, either to the stairs themselves or to the guarding, which would allow a 100mm diameter sphere to pass through.

Ensure the headroom to stairs themselves is a minimum of 2.0m to reduce collisions. In some situations, such as loft conversions, where this is not possible the headroom should be 1.9m at the centre reducing to a minimum of 1.8m at the side.

Ensure there is good lighting at the top and bottom of stairs, which will enable users to identify the first step and the dimensions of the stairs, reducing the possibility of a misstep or slip. Artificial lights and windows should be sited to avoid shadows and dark corners. There should be switches or controls for artificial lighting at both the top and foot of stairs. Glare from windows should be avoided.

Obstructions on stairs or at the head of stairs can increase the risk of a fall. Projections and sharp edges on stairs and glass or radiators at the foot of stairs should be avoided where reasonably practicable. In multi-occupied buildings the owner or manager is also responsible for the stair covering and for ensuring that stairs are kept free from obstructions.

Cold impairs movement and sensation, and a lowered body temperature affects mental functioning, such that falls are more likely in the cold. Ensure that the thermal efficiency of the dwelling allows for a healthy indoor temperature to be maintained throughout by improving thermal insulation and provision and maintenance of heating system.

What preventative measures can tenants and owner occupiers take?

Keep stairs and landings free from obstruction by household articles.

If handrails are removed for reasons such as moving furniture up and down the stairs, ensure that they are replaced securely and positioned as before.

Ensure that any blown or missing light bulbs that are illuminating the stairs are replaced.

Cold impairs movement and sensation, and a lowered body temperature affects mental functioning, such that falls are more likely in the cold. Set controls of the heating system to provide a comfortable indoor temperature at all times. This is of particular importance during cold weather.

Other useful contacts and sources:

Website: <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/privatesectorhousing> - Private Sector Housing pages for Homeowners, Landlords and tenants

Colchester Borough Council's Building Control Section at building.control@colchester.gov.uk or by telephoning 01206 282436

Building Regulations *Approved Document Part K*, *Approved Document Part N*, and British Standards *BS5395, 585, 6180, 5588, and 6262- 4*. Also, see Building Regulations *Approved Document Part M* which deals with the welfare and convenience for building users.

Private Sector Housing

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Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester CO3 3WG

Telephone: Customer Service Centre on 01206 282581 and select Option 6

Fax: 01206 282598

Email: housing.private@colchester.gov.uk