

# Real estate agents warily watch COVID-19 cases rise, hoping another industry shutdown doesn't follow

Although real estate brokers haven't heard talk about another pandemic-caused industry shutdown, "there is a real fear of it" as cases rise and other restrictions return, one agent said.

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Potential buyers are still touring homes, but the delta variant has caused agents to restore some of the earlier pandemic precautions, like mask-wearing and spacing out open house visits.  
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COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are rising, mask mandates are back, and this stage of the pandemic is starting to feel like last year. Home buyers and sellers and their agents are hoping this all doesn't mean another restriction will come back.

Early in the pandemic, while Pennsylvania allowed other businesses to continue in-person operations with safety measures in place, the [governor deemed real estate nonessential](#) and halted many in-person activities.

That restriction [helped stall the usually busy spring real estate market](#) and the momentum that had been building since the winter. So agents are warily watching as the coronavirus spreads and wondering whether the future holds another shutdown.

"There is a fear. There is a real fear of it," said [Christopher Sample, president of the Philadelphia Metropolitan Board of Realtist, the local affiliate of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers](#). Agents and brokers "are very nervous."

More buyers and sellers are worried, too, as COVID-19 case counts rise. Some agents report that among current home seekers, "there is a reluctance to see properties that are occupied," said Sample, an associate broker with Philadelphia-based Able Real Estate. Many of his association's members are giving time slots to potential buyers at open houses to control the flow of visitors.

Although the real estate market has cooled a bit, as usually happens in August and September, home buyers are still active and taking advantage of historically low mortgage interest rates. Homes are still selling quickly in a year that has been record-breaking in numbers of sales for many of the region's real estate brokers.

As more people received COVID-19 immunizations, real estate agents began allowing vaccinated home buyers into showings and open houses without masks, following safety guidelines for businesses. Then, like everyone else, agents, buyers, and sellers started learning more about the coronavirus delta variant and enhanced safety protocols returned.

"I'm always keeping an eye on the pandemic," said Jeff Block, associate broker and head of the City Block Team at Compass Real Estate.

In March 2020, he canceled his team's open houses a week before the region shut down. This month, Block began requiring everyone to wear masks at open houses the week before [Philadelphia announced mask or vaccination mandates for businesses](#). Block said he's generally optimistic about the future, even with the surge in COVID-19 cases.

"One big difference now is we're in a much better place. Nothing is shutting down. It's not like everyone is at home," Block said. "I hope we can see our way through this by just using common sense and being careful and keeping things open."

He and his team will be prepared to go back to virtual interactions with clients if they have to, he said, "but that's certainly not the plan." Virtual showings "barely" kept real estate transactions going in spring 2020, he said. Nothing beats in-person.

Last weekend, 25 parties attended an open house in Germantown, and everyone wore masks, he said. Everyone who comes to an open house must register, a rule that Block and his team implemented last year and had paused as people were getting vaccinated. Once again, QR codes on signs taped to front doors reveal questions about symptoms, exposure, and positive COVID-19 tests.

Buyers have been following reinstated pandemic safety protocols, said Sample of Able Real Estate.

"Especially if they're interested in a property," he said, "they'll do what they have to do to get into that property."

Early in the pandemic, some sellers were reluctant to allow people inside their homes, but even with the increase in COVID-19 cases, they're more comfortable letting people in now, said Robert Acuff, broker and owner of RE/MAX Services in Blue Bell whose team works in Philadelphia and surrounding counties.

“Whatever happens, the real estate community is going to be prepared to adapt to help our clients buy and sell homes,” Acuff said. “The demand is there. Consumers are interested in doing business. It’s our responsibility to serve them in a way they feel safe and comfortable.”

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I’m an urbanism writer covering how people live in their homes, how the market directs choices, and how policies shape communities.

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