



# Selecting Door Locks for Houses in Multiple Occupation

A Landlords Guide

[www.dashservices.org.uk](http://www.dashservices.org.uk)

## Why does the type of door lock matter?

The selection of the correct door locks for use in rented property is very important to maintain both security and fire safety. Indeed, use of the wrong door locks can lead to tenants being trapped in a building during a fire, so this leaflet is designed to help you select the correct door locks for your House in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

The history of locks for doors goes back centuries, so it's not surprising that there are many different lock types, and while this guide is designed to help address the common errors made by landlords in the selection of door locks, it cannot cover every potential scenario. Please contact your local Housing Standards or Environmental Health Department, if you feel you need further advice & you must always consult your own fire risk assessment.

The doors locks in your rented property may have been fitted by you, your contractors or may have been present when you acquired the property.

As the Landlord however, you are ultimately responsible for the safety and security of your tenants, so whether the door locks were fitted by you or were already present, they require assessment to ensure they are correct and meet appropriate safety standards. And remember, in addition to safety and security, the selection of the correct door locks can save time and money on HMO management and tenant damage, please read on to find out how.

## Do I need internal door locks?

Obviously, homes occupied by families won't usually require locks on internal doors, but tenants sharing facilities in HMO's, will often want to lock their bedroom doors at night or when they are out. Not an unreasonable request given the expensive items most renters will now want to secure, and the reasonable desire for privacy and personal security. Landlords can sometimes be resistant to installing locks on HMO bedroom doors. They may incorrectly believe it makes a difference to the 'HMO' status of the property (and that will result in additional expense). This is however an outdated 'myth', stemming from a time when locks on internal doors were one of several determining factors that might indicate a properties gaining 'HMO status'.

These days, 'HMO' has a precise definition based on occupation, and fire precautions are prescribed based on risk (not HMO definitions). So, there is no reason not to fit internal door locks in HMO's, as long as the correct ones are chosen!

Indeed, if you don't fit locks, the likelihood is that a tenant will try to fit their own, potentially causing damage to your property and potentially compromising their fire escape. Hasp locks (as pictured below) are often used by tenants to secure a room where a lock is not provided by the landlord.

As well as looking unsightly and damaging the door (which may be an expensive fire door) they are potentially dangerous, as, being externally mounted, other tenants can lock the room occupier in!



### What type of internal door lock is not acceptable?

The selection of an internal door lock that does not require the use of a key for exiting the room is essential to meet fire safety requirements. This is because, in a fire, tenants can panic and fail to find their keys, quickly becoming overcome by smoke before they manage to exit. This is why key operated mortice and euro style locks which require the insertion of a key on both sides of the door are NOT acceptable (see below).



Examples above of some inappropriate door locks for HMO bedrooms.

Note, there are an increasing amount of battery and electrically powered door locks entering the market, some even using WiFi and smartphone applications for operation. Any lock reliant on a power source or electro-magnets would need to fail-safe (i.e., open) if power were lost, to maintain fire escape. The acceptability of these locks is beyond the scope of this advice leaflet.

### What type of internal door lock is normally acceptable?

To meet fire safety requirements, you must select an internal door lock that provides 'keyless' exit for the internal doors of your HMO. DASH recommend the use of door locks as pictured below for HMO bedrooms. Both 'euro-style' thumb-turn locks or 'keypad' locks are acceptable as they provide 'keyless exit', and prevent accidental lockouts.



**Examples above of some appropriate door locks for HMO bedrooms.**

While there are several other door lock types that meet the same requirement as those shown above, DASH advise you select a lock type that is only lockable from the inside of the room with a 'thumb turn knob', AND is only lockable on the outside of the door with the insertion of a key.

This is because some designs of lock that 'self-latch/lock' when a door is closed, often result in the tenant being locked out of their room (especially if the door has a self-closing mechanism fitted, such as on a fire door). Landlords that have fitted 'self-latching' locks (like night latches as pictured below) because they are cheaper to buy and install, often regret this choice when they get a call at 2am from the tenant asking to be let back into their room ! or worse, the accidental lockout has resulted in catastrophic damaged to the door and frame by forced re-entry. In the longer term therefore, these cheaper locks often end up costing the landlord more than if they had fitted a more expensive thumb-turn lock.



**Night Latches as shown above meet escape requirements, but are NOT recommended for internal doors, as they can result in 'lockouts'.**

### **Which doors require 'Keyless' escape locks?**

In HMO's, any door that has a lock on it must provide 'keyless escape' if it forms part of the primary or secondary fire escape route. In practice, this is any door you might need to travel through to get from anywhere you are in the building to a place of safety outside the house (usually the street). So, most commonly, it will be the bedroom door, and any further internal doors (such as internal porch doors), and the final exit door to the street.

## Does the final exit external door lock need to provide keyless escape?

Yes, it is vital that having provided keyless escape locks to the internal doors of the HMO, tenants are not then trapped by a locked door when they reach the final exit door. This is particularly important, as a tenant fleeing a fire is unlikely to remember their front door key when leaving their bedroom and may not be able to return to their room to retrieve a key if smoke and flames are blocking their way. Please remember, unlike a family house where you might leave your keys in the front for convenience, tenants in HMOs will take their keys to their bedroom.

Also, if the final exit door does not provide keyless escape, a tenant leaving the property might accidentally lock another tenant (or their visitor) inside the HMO, leaving them with no escape.

Note, the choice of an appropriate 'thumb-turn' lock providing keyless escape for an external final exit door to an HMO can be tricky and requires special consideration as it can affect security. Unlike internal doors where the goal is to fit a lock that will not result in accidental lockouts, the final external exit door to an HMO provides better security if it **does** self-latch upon closing. This is because an HMO tenant might forget to lock the door after them when leaving, potentially giving access to anyone who might try the door handle.

DASH therefore recommend final exit exterior doors be fitted with 'thumb-turn' locks that self-latch. The external lock can therefore be of a night latch design. Please fit locks that meet BS3621, which is a lock that meets the British Standards Institute (BSI) requirements for thief-resistant locks. Note: some insurance companies require door locks are fitted to BS 3621 British Standard, and we advise you check with your insurance company before purchase.



## But don't 'Keyless' exit locks compromise security?

While the risk of 'entry by intruders' and fire safety precautions are not always compatible, 'Keyless' exit locks don't make a property any easier to break into. Indeed, an intruder is unlikely to know in advance what type of locks are present internally from the outside. Additional thought may however need to be paid to ensure any internal 'Thumb-turn' lock mechanisms are not visible through windows in the door itself or via other external windows.

Also, some external doors may not require 'Keyless' escape, so a rear exit not forming part of a primary or secondary fire escape route could have a standard lock fitted where there is a significant risk of burglary. You will need to seek professional advice if you are unsure as to whether a particular door requires 'keyless' escape or not.

### Disclaimer

*This leaflet is intended as general goodwill advice only and cannot be relied upon as a definitive guide to what you should do in relation to your specific rented property. Due to the complexities of assessing fire safety risk, the requirements of different insurance companies, and the specification of measures to control that risk, DASH recommend you seek professional fire safety advice in relation to your rental property and the installation of keyless door locks. You should conduct a suitable Fire Safety Risk Assessment, implementing any significant findings, and discuss any findings with your chosen property insurance company before completing any work.*

Further information on DASH Services can be found by visiting our website at [www.dashservices.org.uk](http://www.dashservices.org.uk) or by calling 01332 641111.

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