Signs It's Time to Change or Rekey Your Home Locks

Knowing when to change or rekey the locks in your home is a practical safety decision that many homeowners face at least a few times. The short answer is that you should rekey or replace your locks whenever you lose control over who has a key, when the hardware shows clear signs of wear, or after a change in occupancy such as moving into a new house. Rekeying changes the lock cylinder so old keys no longer work, while a full lock change replaces the entire hardware. Which option fits your situation depends on the condition of your door hardware and your need for key control.

Below we walk through the common scenarios that call for action, how to tell whether rekeying or a full replacement makes more sense, and what to expect from a professional lock change service. Understanding these details helps you keep your home secure without overcomplicating the decision.

Moving into a new home

This is the most straightforward reason to act. When you buy or rent a home, you have no way of knowing how many copies of the existing keys are still out there. Previous owners, their friends, contractors, or a property manager may still hold a key. Even if the seller hands over all the keys they claim to have, there is no guarantee that a copy was never made. Changing the locks or having them rekeyed is the only way to restore your exclusive control.

For a newly purchased house, a full lock change can be a good moment to upgrade the security grade of your deadbolts and entry handles. But if the existing hardware is still in good shape and you just want to make old keys useless, rekeying is faster and costs less. A locksmith can rekey all locks on the same keyway so that a single key opens every exterior door. That convenience alone is worth considering.

After a lost or stolen key

Losing a key is unsettling because you cannot be certain that it simply fell down a drain. If the key had identifying information attached, or if the loss happened near your home, the risk is higher. Rekeying the affected lock is the simplest fix. If you lost a master key that opens multiple locks, you may need to rekey all of them to keep the system consistent.



Stolen keys are an immediate security threat. In that case, a lock change service should be called as soon as possible. The locksmith will either rekey the cylinder or install new hardware, depending on what is needed. The goal is to remove any chance that the stolen key can still operate your locks.

Wear and tear on the lock mechanism

Locks wear out over time. A key that used to turn smoothly may start sticking, requiring jiggling or extra force. The lock cylinder can become loose, and the strike plate may shift as the door settles. These signs of wear do not always mean the lock is about to fail, but they do make it less reliable. A worn lock is also easier to pick or force open.

When the problem is limited to the cylinder, rekeying gives you a fresh set of pins and springs inside the same hardware. But if the deadbolt feels sloppy, the faceplate is cracked, or the lock body itself has corrosion or rust, a full replacement is the better choice. New locks today offer improved materials and better resistance against common break-in methods. A professional can assess the condition of your door hardware and recommend whether rekeying or replacement is appropriate.

After a break-in or attempted break-in

A burglary or even a failed entry attempt can damage the locking mechanism. The strike plate might be bent, the deadbolt sheared, or the cylinder twisted. Even if the lock still functions, its structural integrity is compromised. Replacing the entire lock assembly restores the door's

security to a known baseline. In some cases, you may also want to reinforce the strike plate with longer screws that anchor into the door frame.

If the intruder did not damage the lock but simply used a copied key, rekeying is sufficient. The key question is whether the hardware shows any physical deformation. When in doubt, a locksmith can inspect the lock and tell you if rekeying will be enough or if a full change is necessary.

When you want to upgrade security

Not every lock change is driven by an incident. Sometimes you simply want better security than the current locks provide. Older homes often have locks with a low security grade that are easy to bump or pick. Upgrading to a deadbolt with a hardened steel bolt and a pick-resistant cylinder makes a real difference. If you are installing a new door or replacing old hardware anyway, it is a natural time to raise the security level.

Rekeying alone does not upgrade the hardware, so if your goal is stronger construction, choose a full lock change. The locksmith can match the new hardware to your existing door prep, or adjust the door as needed. A lock change service can also set up a master key system for a house with multiple entry points, so you have one key for everything while still keeping a separate key for, say, a rental unit or a workshop.

For homeowners in Nassau County, working with a mobile locksmith who knows the area's common door types and security concerns is helpful. A company like locksmithnassaucounty.com can handle both rekeying and full replacements, and they will advise on the best approach for your specific doors. That local knowledge means the work is done efficiently and the locks are suited to the kind of houses found in the region.



Shared living situations and departing tenants

If you have a roommate who moves out, a tenant who leaves, or a household employee who no longer works for you, the keys they held should be considered compromised. Even if they return the keys, copies may exist. Rekeying the locks they had access to is a simple step that protects your privacy and safety. Landlords are wise to rekey between tenants as a standard practice.

The same logic applies after a divorce or separation. When a relationship ends and one person moves out, the remaining occupant should have the locks changed or rekeyed. It is not about distrust; it is about establishing clear, exclusive control over who can enter the home.

Rekeying vs. full replacement: how to decide

Rekeying works well when the existing lock hardware is in good condition and you only need to invalidate old keys. A locksmith removes the cylinder, inserts a new set of pins, and reassembles it. Your existing keys become useless, and you get a fresh set of keys that work with the new pin configuration. The cost is lower because the hardware stays the same. Rekeying is also faster, often taking just a few minutes per lock.

A full lock change is necessary when the hardware is damaged, outdated, or not secure enough for your needs. It involves removing the old lock and strike plate, installing new components, and ensuring everything aligns properly. This takes more time and costs more, but it gives you modern hardware and the chance to choose a lock with a higher security grade.

Full replacement is also the right choice if you want to change the keyway type, move to a different brand, or add features like a keypad or smart lock capability.

There is no one-size-fits-all answer. The decision depends on the condition of your current locks and your security goals. A trustworthy locksmith will give you an honest assessment and explain both options.

Practical steps when you call a locksmith

Before you schedule a lock change service, take a few minutes to inspect your doors. Note the brand and model of the locks if visible. Check whether the deadbolt extends smoothly and whether the strike plate is firmly attached. If you have multiple exterior doors, think about whether you want them all keyed alike. This is the time to decide if you want to upgrade to a higher security grade or add a deadbolt where only a knob lock exists.

When the locksmith arrives, they will evaluate the hardware and confirm the scope of work. For rekeying, they will need the current key or access to the cylinder. For a full replacement, they will measure the door prep and choose a suitable lock. The process is straightforward, and most jobs are completed within an hour or two depending on the number of locks.



After the work is done, test every lock with the new key before the locksmith leaves. Make sure the deadbolt throws and retracts fully, the key turns without binding, and the strike plate holds the bolt securely. A small adjustment on the spot can save frustration later.

Final thoughts on timing

There is no set schedule for changing locks. Some locks last decades with only a rekey when needed, while others wear out sooner due to heavy use or exposure to the elements. The right time to act is when you lose key control, notice a decline in performance, or experience a change in who lives in or has access to your home. Trusting your instincts is fine - if a lock feels loose or the key is hard to turn, it is worth having a professional look at it.

For residents of Nassau County, a reliable mobile locksmith like locksmithnassaucounty.com can handle rekeying and lock changes for homes of all ages. Their technicians work with a range of door hardware and can guide you toward the right solution for your situation. Keeping your home's locks in good working order is one of the simplest ways to maintain security and peace of mind.