What New Homeowners Should Check About Their Locks

Why your new home's locks need a fresh look

Moving into a new house brings a long list of tasks. Among them, checking the security of every door lock might not feel urgent, but it is one of the most practical steps you can take. You never know how many copies of the keys are floating around. Previous owners may have given copies to neighbors, contractors, or relatives. That uncertainty is reason enough to assess the situation before you settle in.

For most new homeowners, a full residential lock replacement is not always necessary. In many cases, rekeying the existing locks gives you control over who can enter. Rekeying changes the lock cylinder so old keys no longer work, while the hardware stays in place. It is a straightforward process that handles the security concern without the cost or labor of swapping out all the door hardware. If the locks themselves are in good condition, rekeying is often the smarter move.

This article walks through a practical checklist for evaluating your new home's locks. Each point explains what to look for and why it matters, so you can decide which approach fits your situation. Whether you choose rekeying or a full swap, the goal is the same: peace of mind that only you and your household have working keys.

Check the age and condition of each lock

Start by inspecting every exterior lock on the property. Look at the cylinder, the deadbolt, and the strike plate. If any piece shows rust, corrosion, or visible wear, it may not function reliably. A lock that sticks or requires extra force to turn is a sign of internal wear. Old locks can fail at the worst moment, leaving you locked out or unable to secure the door properly.

Even if a lock looks fine externally, the internal mechanism may be worn. Locks that have been used heavily for years can have worn pins and springs. A locksmith can tell you whether the lock is still serviceable or needs to be replaced. If the lock is from an off-brand manufacturer or has an unusual design, finding replacement parts later could be difficult. In that case, a full residential lock replacement might be the more practical long-term choice.



Identify which doors need better security

Not every door in a house requires the same level of protection. A front door that opens directly into a living area needs a strong deadbolt and a secure strike plate. A side door to a garage or a basement door may be less visible and therefore more vulnerable. Those doors deserve extra attention. A sliding glass door often needs a different kind of lock or a secondary locking mechanism.

Walk around the property and note which doors are primary entry points and which are secondary. Consider how each door is used. A door that is used daily needs a lock that is convenient and durable. A door that is rarely opened can use a simpler lock, but it must still be secure. Matching the lock type to the door's use helps you avoid overspending on hardware you do not need or undersecuring a vulnerable entry.

Decide between rekeying and replacement

Rekeying is the most common solution for new homeowners. A locksmith removes the lock cylinder and reconfigures its pins so that a new key operates it. All the rekeyed cylinders then work with the same key, which simplifies key control. You end up with one key for all exterior doors instead of a separate key for each lock. Rekeying is usually faster and less expensive than replacing the entire lock.

However, rekeying only makes sense if the existing hardware is in good shape. If a lock is damaged, outdated, or of low security grade, replacement is the better route. A lock change

service can remove the old hardware and install a new lock that meets current security standards. New locks often come with features like anti-pick pins, hardened steel deadbolts, and reinforced strike plates. For a door that sees heavy use or faces a public street, upgrading the lock can add real protection.

Check the strike plate and door frame

A strong lock is only as good as the door frame it anchors into. Many residential doors have strike plates attached with short screws that barely reach into the door frame. A determined kick can split the frame and pop the lock open. Replacing the strike plate with a heavy-duty version and using longer screws that reach into the wall stud makes the assembly much harder to force.

Look at the condition of the door frame itself. Rot, cracks, or previous break-ins can weaken the frame. If the frame is compromised, even the best deadbolt will not hold. In that case, reinforcing the frame or replacing it should come before any work on the lock. A good locksmith can assess the frame and recommend the right hardware and anchoring method.

Consider key control and master key options

If your household has multiple people coming and going, key control becomes important. Rekeying all locks to the same key simplifies life for everyone. You can also set up a master key system where one key opens all doors, while each family member gets a key that works only on their own door. This is useful for homes with a separate entrance for a rental unit or a home office.

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Key control also means deciding how many spare keys to make and who gets them. It is a good idea to keep a spare in a secure place, not under a doormat or in a fake rock. A better option is to leave a spare with a trusted neighbor or in a lockbox that requires a code. The fewer keys in circulation, the lower the risk of unauthorized entry.

Evaluate the overall security grade of your hardware

Not all locks offer the same level of protection. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) grades locks from 1 to 3, with grade 1 being the most durable and secure. Many residential locks are grade 2 or 3, which is adequate for moderate use but may not stand up to

forced entry. If your home has grade 3 locks on exterior doors, upgrading to grade 1 or grade 2 hardware adds noticeable strength.

Look at the deadbolt throw. A deadbolt should extend at least one inch into the strike plate. Some older locks have shorter bolts that are easier to force. Also check whether the deadbolt has a hardened steel insert to resist cutting. These details matter more than the brand name on the lock. A locksmith can help you compare the security grade of your current hardware against what is available today.

Plan for a lock change service if needed

If your inspection reveals issues that rekeying cannot fix, you will want to schedule a lock change service. This involves removing the old lock entirely and installing a new one that fits the door and your security needs. The new lock should match the door's thickness and bore size, and it should work with the existing deadbolt and strike plate setup. A professional will also check that the new lock aligns properly so the deadbolt slides smoothly into the strike plate.

When you schedule the work, ask about the specific hardware recommended for your door type. For example, a metal door may need a different lock than a wooden door. A door with a glass panel near the lock may need a lock that is pick-resistant or has a shielded cylinder. The installer should also verify that the new lock matches the existing key system if you want all doors to use the same key.

Test everything after the work is done

Once the locks are rekeyed or replaced, test each one. Insert the key and turn it several times. Make sure the deadbolt extends and retracts smoothly. Check that the latch aligns with the strike plate and does not rub or stick. If a door does not close properly, the lock may not engage fully. A door that needs to be lifted or pushed to lock is a sign of misalignment that should be corrected before you consider the job finished.

Also test the lock from the inside. Make sure the thumb turn or knob works easily. If the lock has a keypad or smart features, test those functions too. Walk away from the door and come back to confirm that the lock operates consistently. A small adjustment at this stage can prevent a lockout or a security gap later.



Make a plan for future maintenance

Locks wear over time, even with normal use. Lubricating the mechanism once a year with a graphite-based lubricant keeps the pins moving freely. Avoid oil-based lubricants because they attract dust and gum up the works. Check the screws on the strike plate and hinges periodically to make sure they are tight. A loose strike plate can cause the lock to misalign.

If you add new doors or change the layout of your home, revisit the lock plan. The same principles apply: match the lock to the door's use, use a single key system where possible, and reinforce the frame and strike plate. Keeping your locks in good condition is a simple habit that pays off in convenience and security.

Walking through this checklist gives you a clear picture of your new home's lock security. You will know which doors need attention, whether rekeying is enough, and when a full replacement makes sense. The goal is control and confidence, not just a new set of keys.