# When should a storefront replace its locks?

## Signs it is time for new storefront locks

A storefront lock gets used hundreds of times a week. Over time, the internal parts wear down, the key no longer turns smoothly, and the lock becomes less secure. The general rule is simple: replace a lock when it no longer provides reliable security or when you have lost control over who holds keys. But the decision is rarely that straightforward. A few specific warning signs can tell you that the lock has reached the end of its useful life.

## Physical wear and key trouble

The most obvious sign is a key that sticks, jams, or requires jiggling to work. That drag you feel is the pins and springs inside the cylinder wearing unevenly. A worn lock can fail completely, leaving you locked out or unable to secure the door at closing time. Even if the lock still works, the extra effort needed to turn the key puts strain on the whole mechanism and on the door handle or panic bar. If you have noticed that the key has become harder to insert or remove, the lock cylinder likely needs replacing.

Another physical clue is visible damage. A storefront door takes bumps from carts, deliveries, and heavy use. A lock that has been struck hard enough may have a misaligned bolt or a cracked housing. If the deadbolt does not slide fully into the strike plate, or if the latch sticks partway, the lock is no longer secure. A forced entry attempt, even a failed one, can bend internal parts. After any break-in or attempted break-in, replacing the lock is the safe move.

## Lost keys and uncontrolled copies

Losing a set of keys is one of the most common reasons to replace a lock. In a commercial setting, the problem is bigger than in a home. A lost key might have been held by a former employee, a cleaning crew member, or a delivery driver. If you cannot be sure that the key will not be used by someone else, the lock should be replaced. Rekeying is sometimes an option, but if the cylinder is old or worn, a full replacement is better.




The same logic applies when an employee leaves on bad terms or when a tenant moves out of a shared building. You cannot simply ask for the keys back and trust that no copies were made. Restricted key systems help with this problem, but if your current locks use standard keys that can be duplicated at any hardware store, a replacement with a restricted keyway is worth considering.

## Upgrading security and access control

Sometimes the lock works fine but no longer meets your security needs. A basic keyed lock offers no way to track who enters and when, and no way to change access without changing the lock. Many storefronts today move to electronic access control that uses a keypad, a card reader, or a smartphone app. These systems let you issue temporary codes to staff, revoke access instantly, and review entry logs. If you are thinking about adding access control, the existing mechanical locks often need to be replaced with compatible egress hardware that works with the new system.

Even if you stay with mechanical locks, upgrading to a higher security grade makes sense for a storefront. Grade 1 locks, the commercial standard, are built to withstand repeated use and moderate force. If your current locks are residential-grade or older Grade 2 models, replacing them with Grade 1 hardware improves both durability and security.

## Changes to the door itself

A storefront door that has been adjusted, replaced, or refitted may need new locks. If the door now has a different thickness, a different backset, or a different handing (left- or right-swing), the existing lock may not fit properly. A door that has settled or warped can cause the bolt to miss the strike plate, making the lock ineffective. In these cases, replacing the lock with one that matches the current door dimensions is the only way to restore proper function.

New fire-rated doors require special attention. The lock and all hardware must be listed for use with that door assembly. Using the wrong lock on a fire door can void the rating and create a safety hazard. If you are replacing a door or adding a new storefront, the lock should be chosen at the same time to ensure compatibility.



## Master key systems and tenant turnover

In a building with multiple tenants or multiple doors, master key systems are a practical way to give different people different levels of access. A property manager might carry a master key that opens every storefront, while each tenant has a key that opens only their own space. These systems work well when they are properly designed and maintained. But when a tenant leaves, the locks on that unit should be changed or rekeyed to keep the system secure. If the cylinder is old or if the system was not set up with restricted keyways, replacing the lock is the safer route.

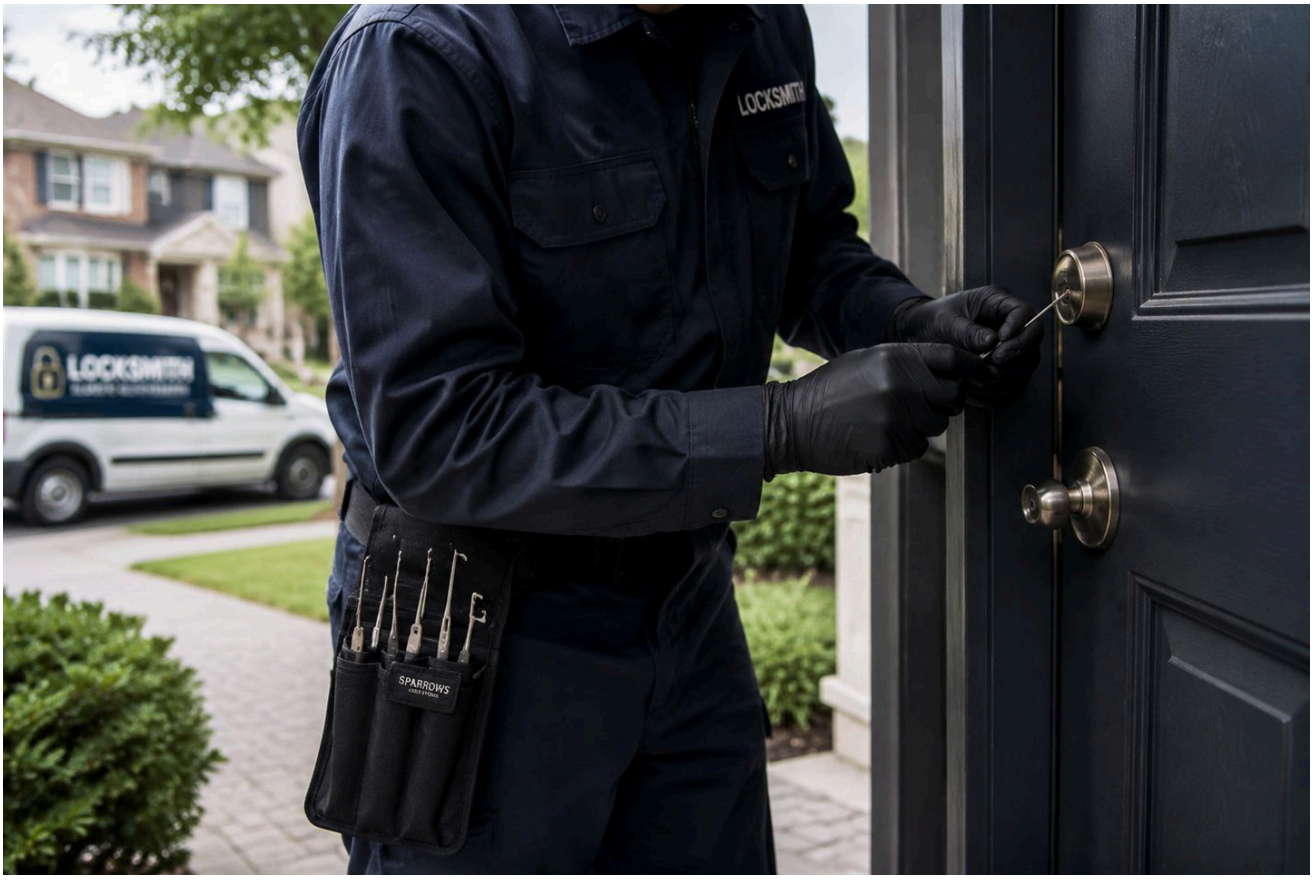
Master key systems can also become a security risk over time if too many keys are in circulation or if the system has been added to without proper planning. If you have taken over a building with an existing master key system and do not know how many masters exist, replacing the locks gives you a clean start. A new system, set up with controlled keyways, lets you manage access with confidence.

## Compliance and insurance requirements

Insurance policies and local building codes sometimes dictate when a lock must be replaced. For example, a storefront that serves the public must have panic hardware that allows the door to open easily from the inside without a key. If your existing lock does not meet current codes, or if an insurance inspection flags the hardware as inadequate, replacement is not optional. The same applies to locks on fire exits and doors that are part of an accessible path of travel. Replacing non-compliant locks with approved egress hardware protects both your customers and your liability coverage.

## Preventive replacement before a problem

Some storefront owners wait for a lock to fail before replacing it. That approach can lead to a lockout at an inconvenient time or, worse, a security breach. A more practical strategy is to replace locks on a schedule based on usage. A high-traffic storefront that sees hundreds of entries per day may need new locks every two to three years. A lower-traffic location might go five years before the cylinder shows wear. If you cannot remember when the locks were last changed, it is probably time to inspect them and consider replacement.




A simple test can help. Insert the key and turn it. Does it rotate smoothly without hesitation? Does the bolt extend and retract fully? Does the key come out easily when the lock is unlocked? If the answer to any of these is no, the lock is telling you it is ready to be replaced. The cost of a new lock is small compared to the cost of a break-in or the inconvenience of a lockout.

Replacing storefront locks is not just about fixing a broken part. It is about maintaining control over who can enter, keeping the door reliable, and meeting the security and safety standards that a commercial space requires. When a lock shows signs of wear, when you have lost track of the keys, or when you want to upgrade to better access control, replacement is the right move.