Rekeying vs. Replacing Locks After Moving In

Why your new home's locks need attention

When you move into a house or apartment, you inherit every key that has ever been copied, handed out, or lost by the previous owners. That unknown key chain is a real security risk. You have two main ways to close that gap: rekeying the existing locks or replacing them entirely. Each option has its own advantages, and the right choice depends on the condition of your current hardware, your budget, and your long-term plans for the property.

What rekeying involves

Rekeying means changing the internal pins inside the lock cylinder so that the old keys no longer work. A new key is cut to match the new pin arrangement. The lock body, strike plate, and exterior trim stay in place. A locksmith removes the cylinder, takes it apart, swaps the pins, and reassembles it. The whole process takes minutes per lock and costs less than buying a whole new lock set.

The big advantage is that you keep the same hardware. If your doors already have solid deadbolts and good-quality handles, rekeying lets you secure the home without replacing anything. It also works well when you want all your exterior doors to use the same key. A locksmith can rekey multiple cylinders to match a single keyway, so you carry one key for every door instead of a ring full of different ones.

Rekeying is also a good route if you have older or antique locks that would be hard to match with modern replacements. Preserving the original hardware while making it secure is often the best outcome.



When replacement makes more sense

Replacing a lock means taking off the old unit and installing a new one, including the cylinder, the body, the strike plate, and sometimes the deadbolt itself. This is the right path when the existing locks are worn out, damaged, or of poor quality. A deadbolt that sticks, a cylinder that feels loose, or a strike plate that no longer lines up with the bolt are signs that replacement is due.

Newer locks also offer features that older ones lack. You might want a deadbolt with a reinforced strike plate and longer screws that bite into the door frame rather than just the trim. Some homeowners upgrade to a smart lock that works with a keypad or a phone app, which eliminates the need for physical keys altogether. If you want to install a master key system for a property with multiple doors, a new lock set designed for that purpose is usually simpler than rekeying older cylinders.

Replacement is also the safer choice when you are unsure about the lock's history. A lock that has been forced open, drilled, or subjected to weather for years may have hidden damage that rekeying won't fix.

Comparing the two approaches side by side

Here is a quick look at how rekeying and replacement stack up against each other:

- **Cost:** Rekeying is the cheaper option because you are not buying new hardware. Replacement costs more, especially if you choose premium deadbolts or electronic

locks.

- **Time:** A locksmith can rekey several locks in a single visit. Replacement takes longer per door because the old unit must be removed and the new one fitted.
- **Security level:** Rekeying gives you the same security as the original lock. Replacement lets you upgrade to a higher grade, such as a Grade 1 deadbolt with a hardened steel bolt and anti-pick pins.
- **Key compatibility:** Rekeying lets you match all locks to one key. Replacement offers the same benefit if you buy locks from the same brand and keyway.
- **Long-term value:** Rekeying works well when the hardware is still in good shape. Replacement is better when the hardware is old, damaged, or no longer meets your needs.

Things to check before you decide

Start by inspecting each exterior door. Look at the deadbolt and the strike plate. Does the bolt slide in and out smoothly? Is the strike plate attached with short screws that barely reach the door jamb? If the screws are short, the bolt can be forced open with a kick. A replacement with longer screws and a reinforced strike plate adds real strength.



Check the keyway. If the key feels worn or the cylinder turns with too much play, the lock may be near the end of its service life. Also look at the door jamb itself. A cracked or rotted jamb will not hold a strike plate securely no matter how good the lock is. That structural issue needs to be repaired before you install new hardware.

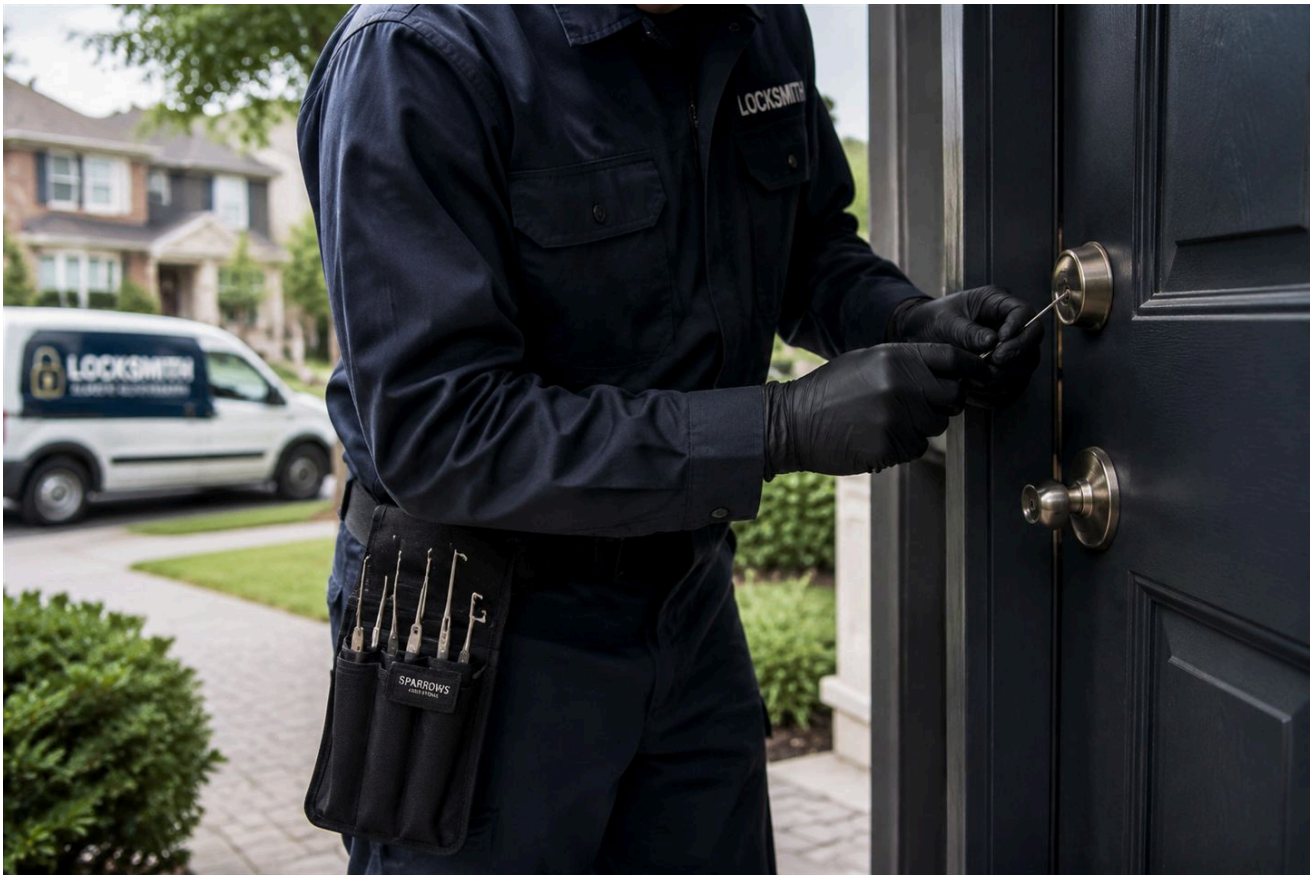
Consider whether you want a smart lock or a keyless entry system. Smart locks require power, usually from batteries, and they connect to your home Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. They offer convenience, letting you let in a guest or a service person without handing out a spare key. But they also introduce electronics that can fail or be hacked, so you may want a backup keyway option. A locksmith can advise on which models work with your door thickness and bore hole size.

Who should do the work

Rekeying is not a DIY job for most people. It requires a set of pinning tools, a follower, and the correct replacement pins. You also need to know how to disassemble the cylinder without damaging it. A professional locksmith can do it quickly and correctly. The same goes for deadbolt installation: mounting the lock, aligning the strike plate, and ensuring the bolt seats properly in the jamb takes precision. A poorly installed deadbolt can be bypassed easily.

If you decide to replace your locks, a mobile locksmith can come to your home, measure the existing bore holes, and install new hardware that fits without extra drilling. That saves you from having to buy tools and risk damaging your door.

For residents of Toronto and the GTA, a service such as Royal Secure Locksmith provides emergency, residential, commercial, and automotive locksmith help. They can rekey your existing cylinders or install new deadbolts and smart locks, all at your location.



Making the final call

If your current locks are in good condition and you simply want to control who has keys, rekeying is the practical move. It is fast, affordable, and keeps your existing hardware. If your locks are old, damaged, or not up to modern security standards, replacement is the better investment. You gain a stronger deadbolt, possibly a smart lock, and the peace of mind that comes with brand-new components.

No matter which route you choose, the important thing is to act quickly after moving in. You never know how many copies of the old keys are out there. A locksmith can handle the job in a single visit, and you can sleep soundly knowing that only your keys work the locks. If you need help deciding what is best for your doors, a professional can inspect the hardware and give you a clear recommendation. A company like **Royal Secure Locksmith** can assess the condition of your locks and handle both rekeying and replacement, so you get the right solution for your home.