Lock rekeying versus full lock replacement for a new home

Moving into a different home brings a long list of tasks, and changing the locks is one that should not wait. You never know how many copies of the existing keys are out there. The previous owner may have handed spare keys to neighbours, cleaners, or dog walkers. A lost key from years ago might still be in someone's possession. For peace of mind, you need to control who can enter. That leaves you with two practical paths: rekey the existing locks or replace them entirely. Each approach has its own strengths, and the right choice depends on the condition of your hardware, your budget, and your long-term plans for the property.

What rekeying involves

Rekeying changes the internal pins and springs inside a lock cylinder so that the old keys no longer work. A new set of keys is cut to match the new pin configuration. The lock itself stays in place. The same deadbolt, the same strike plate, the same door jamb hardware remains. Only the inside of the cylinder is altered. This is a precise mechanical job that requires the right tools and a supply of correctly sized pins. A professional locksmith can usually rekey a standard cylinder on site in a short visit.

The main advantage is cost. Rekeying is generally less expensive than buying and installing a whole new lock set, especially if you have multiple doors that need to match. If your current locks are in good condition and you like their style, rekeying gives you fresh security without changing the look of your doors. It also lets you keep the same keyway if you want all exterior doors to operate with a single key. A locksmith can rekey several cylinders to the same key, so one key opens every rekeyed lock.

Rekeying works well when the existing hardware is sturdy and not worn out. A quality deadbolt or knob set from a reputable manufacturer can last for decades. If the locks are relatively new or show no signs of damage, there is no need to discard them. Rekeying restores security at a fraction of the replacement cost.

When replacement makes more sense

Sometimes the lock hardware itself is the problem. Older locks may have loose mechanisms, stripped screws, or a worn cylinder that does not turn smoothly. A deadbolt that sticks or a latch that no longer aligns with the strike plate can indicate that the lock has reached the end of its useful life. In such cases, rekeying only addresses the keying, not the mechanical issues. A new lock unit provides fresh moving parts and a better fit.



Replacement also gives you a chance to upgrade. If your current locks are basic models with low security ratings, you can switch to a deadbolt with a hardened steel bolt, a reinforced strike plate, and a pick-resistant cylinder. Some homeowners prefer the convenience of a smart lock that works with a keypad or a smartphone. A full replacement lets you choose the level of security and the features that suit your household. Rekeying keeps you locked into whatever hardware is already installed.

Another scenario that calls for replacement is when the lock type does not match the door preparation. A new home might have a mix of knob locks and deadbolts that were installed at different times. Standardising on one brand or style can simplify key management. If you plan

to install a master key system for a multi-unit property or a home with multiple entry points, replacing all locks with compatible cylinders is often the cleaner route.

Comparing the trade-offs

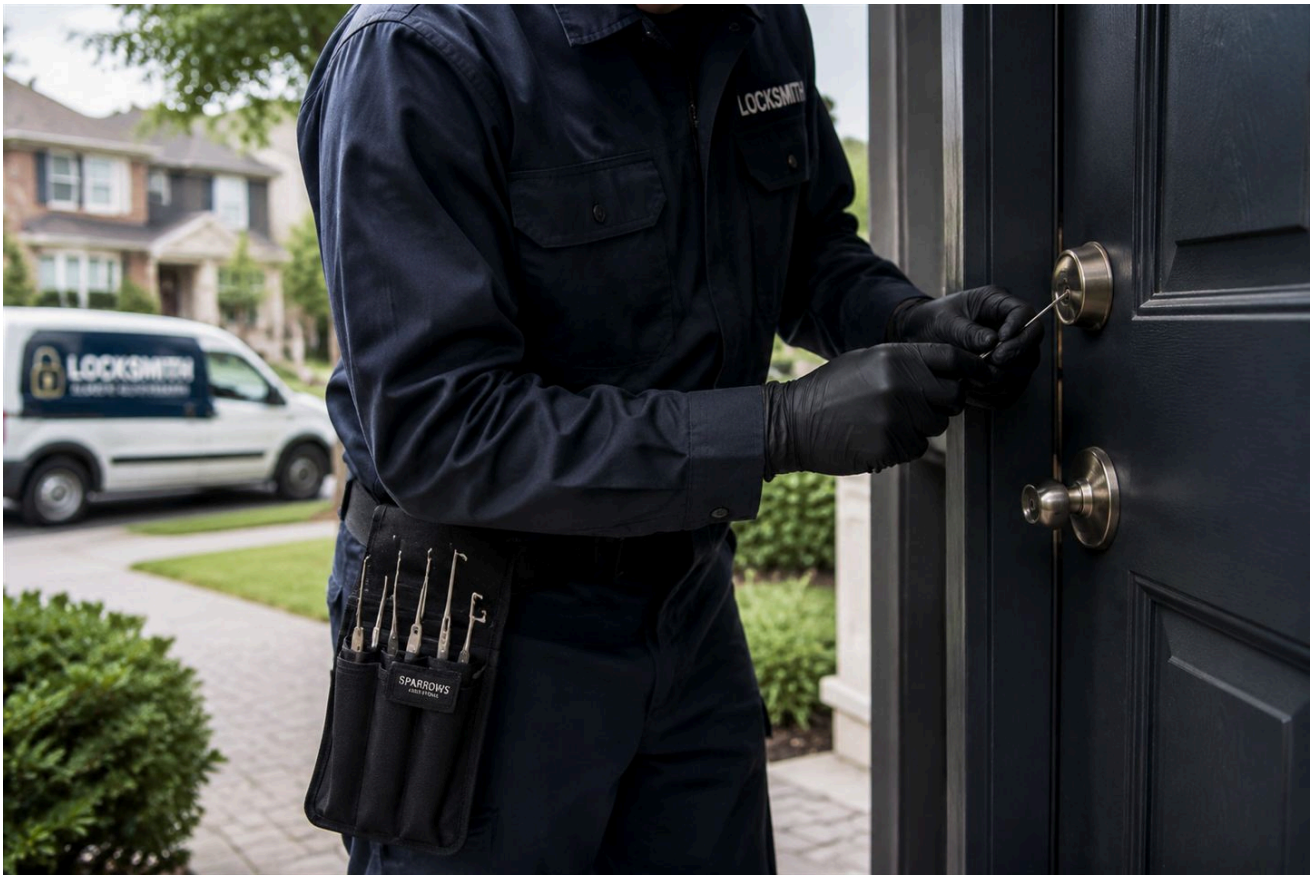
Rekeying is faster and cheaper when the hardware is sound. A locksmith can rekey a cylinder in minutes without removing the entire lock from the door. Replacement takes longer because the old lock must be unbolted, a new unit fitted, and the latch and strike plate aligned properly. That extra labour adds to the cost, especially if the new lock requires modifications to the door or the frame.

On the other hand, a new lock comes with a warranty and a known service life. Rekeyed cylinders are only as reliable as the rest of the lock. A worn lock may fail soon after rekeying, which means you pay twice. Replacement gives you a clean start with hardware that should perform well for years.

Security level is another factor. A standard residential lock cylinder can be rekeyed, but it cannot gain the features of a high-security cylinder. If you want a patented keyway that prevents unauthorized duplication, or a lock with anti-drill and anti-pick protection, you need to buy a lock that includes those features. Rekeying a basic cylinder does not upgrade its resistance to physical attack.

For renters, rekeying is often the preferred option. Landlords may allow a professional rekey as long as the original hardware stays intact and the tenant returns the new keys at move-out. Replacing the lock entirely might require landlord approval and a commitment to restore the original hardware later. Tenants who want quick, low-cost security often choose rekeying.

Homeowners who plan to stay for many years might lean toward replacement. The upfront investment buys a consistent look across all doors, a single key for the whole house, and the peace of mind that comes with brand-new hardware. If the home has older locks from different eras, replacement eliminates the hassle of matching keys to mismatched cylinders.



Key considerations before deciding

Start by inspecting your current locks. Turn the key and the thumb turn. Does the bolt extend and retract smoothly? Does the lock feel solid or does it wobble? Check the screws on the strike plate and the hinges. If the door itself is warped or the jamb is damaged, no amount of rekeying or replacement will fix the fit. Structural repairs to the door or frame should be done first.

Think about key control. If you need multiple family members to have their own keys, or if you want to give a spare to a house sitter, rekeying to a single key is simple. If you prefer a keyless entry system, replacement is the only path. Smart locks can be programmed with temporary codes for guests, which eliminates the need for physical keys altogether.

Consider the number of doors. A typical home has two or three exterior entry points. Rekeying all of them to the same key is straightforward. If you have a larger property with several exterior doors, a garage door, and a side gate, the cost of replacing every lock can add up. Rekeying lets you secure all entries at a lower total cost.

Check the brand and model of your existing locks. Some budget cylinders are not designed to be rekeyed multiple times. The internal components may be plastic or lightly built. If the

cylinder feels flimsy, replacement is the better bet. Higher-end locks from established brands can be rekeyed many times over their lifespan.

Practical steps for the homeowner

If you decide to rekey, call a professional locksmith rather than attempting a DIY rekey kit. Rekeying requires precision. A tiny mistake in pin height can leave a lock that jams or fails to operate. A locksmith carries the right pinning kit and knows how to match the key to the cylinder. Many locksmiths also offer a lock rekeying service that includes rekeying multiple cylinders to one key and providing new keys.

If you choose replacement, measure the backset - the distance from the edge of the door to the centre of the lock hole - and the cross bore diameter before you buy. Standard dimensions are common, but older or custom doors may need a specific size. A locksmith can help you select a lock that fits your door and meets your security needs.

For either option, keep the original keys until the work is done. If you rekey, the locksmith will need one working key to confirm the cylinder is pinned correctly. If you replace, the old keys are no longer useful, but you may want to keep one as a reference for future lock purchases.



Once the locks are updated, make a habit of testing them every few months. Lubricate the cylinder with a dry graphite powder if it feels sticky. Do not use oil-based lubricants, which attract dust and gum up the pins. A well-maintained lock will serve you for many years.

If you live in the Toronto area and need a reliable professional, Royal Secure Locksmith provides emergency, residential, commercial, and automotive locksmith help throughout Toronto and the GTA. Their team can rekey or replace locks on site, helping you secure your new home quickly. Whether you choose rekeying or replacement, the goal is the same: a home where only you and your family have the keys. Taking that step early in the moving process gives you one less thing to worry about as you settle in.

Ultimately, the decision comes down to the condition of your existing hardware and your future plans. Rekeying is a fast, cost-effective fix for sound locks. Replacement gives you a fresh start with upgraded features and a longer service life. Both methods achieve the primary goal of restricting access to authorised key holders. The right choice is the one that matches your home's current state and your own priorities for security, convenience, and budget.