

Should You Rekey After a Lockout? Here's What a Locksmith Would Tell You

Why a lockout can change how you think about your keys

Getting locked out of your home or car in Los Angeles is one of those moments that makes you rethink your whole setup. You stand there, keys on the other side of the door, maybe in the middle of a hot afternoon or late at night, and you realize that the lock that was supposed to protect you just kept you out instead. When the emergency service arrives and gets you back inside, the immediate relief is huge. But once you are in, a quieter question starts to form: is that lock still safe to use?

That is where the idea to rekey after lockout comes in. It is not something most people think about right away, but it is one of the more practical moves you can make after a lockout situation. A locksmith will tell you that a lockout is not always just a mechanical failure. Sometimes it reveals a deeper issue with the lock cylinder, the keyway, or even the bitting of your existing keys. And in some cases, someone else might have had access to your keys long enough to duplicate them without your knowledge. Rekeying is a way to reset that whole system without replacing the entire lock.

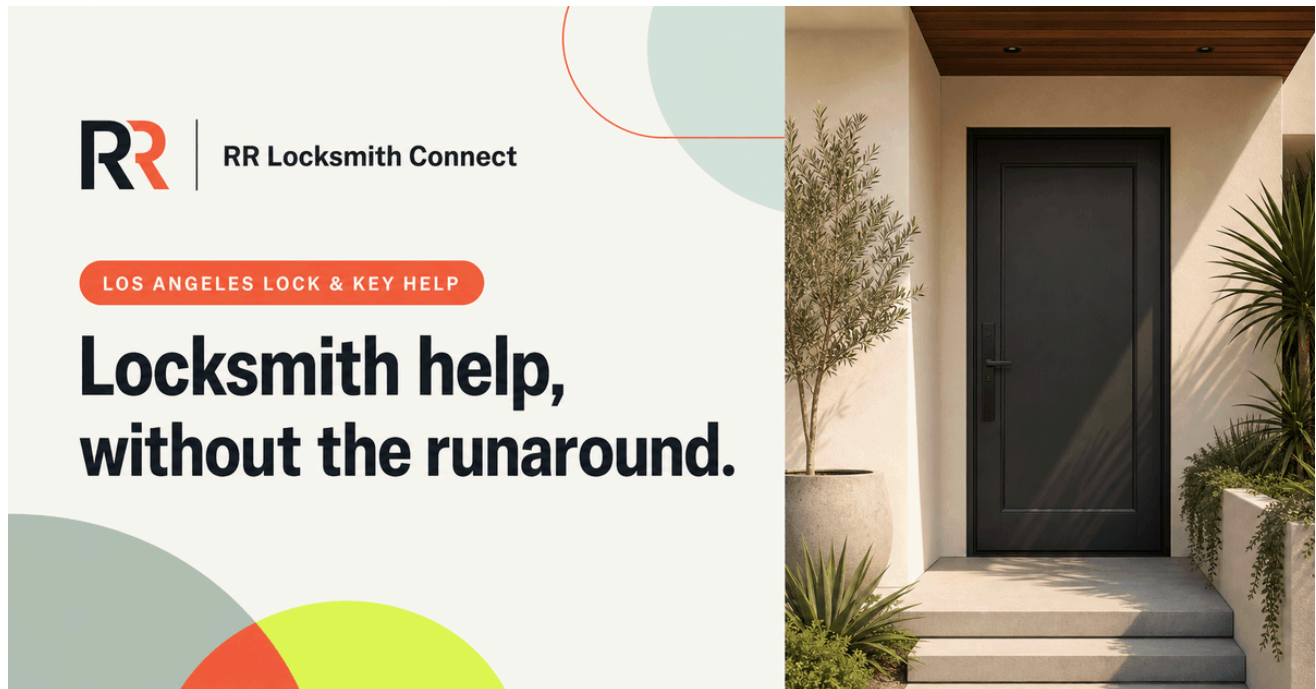
What rekeying actually means for your door

Rekeying changes the internal configuration of a lock so that the old keys no longer work, while the lock hardware itself stays in place. A locksmith removes the lock cylinder, changes the pin stack or the bitting pattern, and installs a new set of keys that match the new keyway. This works on most common residential lock types, including Schlage, Kwikset, and Yale deadbolts and knob locks. It is less expensive than buying a whole new lock set, and it keeps your existing door hardware, which matters if you have a Baldwin trim or a Medeco high-security cylinder that you do not want to swap out.

For someone in Los Angeles who just went through a lockout, the decision to [rekey after lockout](#) depends on how the lockout happened. If you lost your keys or had them stolen while you were out, and a stranger could have picked them up, rekeying is a no-brainer. Even if you just left them inside and called a locksmith to pick the lock, there is still a case for rekeying. The emergency service that got you in might have used a bump key or lock picking to open the door. Those methods can sometimes wear down the security pins inside the lock cylinder, making it easier for someone else to pick later. Replacing the pins through rekeying restores the lock's original security level.

When rekeying makes more sense than replacing the lock

Most people assume that after a lockout, they need to buy all new locks. That is not always true. If your existing lock is a solid deadbolt from Schlage or Kwikset, the metal parts are likely fine. The only thing that changed is that the keying is now compromised or the pins have shifted slightly. A locksmith can rekey that deadbolt in about twenty minutes and hand you a fresh set of keys. The cost is usually less than half of what a new lock would run, especially if you have multiple doors keyed alike.



Key duplication is another factor. If you had a spare key with a neighbor or in your car, and that key was used during the lockout, anyone who had access to it could have made a copy without your knowledge. Rekeying after a lockout eliminates that risk because it creates a new keying system that none of the old copies fit. That is one of the strongest arguments for rekeying instead of just moving on after the emergency service leaves.

How a locksmith approaches the job

A professional locksmith will start by inspecting the lock cylinder and the surrounding hardware. They look for signs of forced entry, wear on the keyway, or damage from a bump key. In some cases, the lockout happened because the bitting was worn down from years of use, and the lock just stopped recognizing the key. That is a mechanical issue, not a security breach, but it still warrants rekeying because the old keys are unreliable.

If the lock is a smart lock, the process is different. Smart locks from Yale or Schlage often have a mechanical override cylinder for emergency access. If that cylinder was used during the lockout, it can be rekeyed separately from the electronic part. The smart lock itself does not need to be replaced. A locksmith can rekey just the backup cylinder and reprogram the

electronic access codes. That keeps your smart home setup intact while closing the physical security gap.

What about Medeco and high-security locks?

Medeco locks are built with restricted keyways and patented bitting that make them harder to pick or bump. But even a Medeco cylinder can be rekeyed. The difference is that the replacement keys must come from an authorized dealer, and the locksmith needs to work with the restricted keying system. It is not a quick pin swap like on a standard Kwikset knob lock, but it can be done. If you have Medeco hardware and you are considering a rekey after lockout, it is worth asking your locksmith whether they are authorized to handle that brand. Not every emergency service carries the right blanks or cutting equipment.

The one time rekeying might not be enough

If the lockout involved physical damage to the door or the lock body, such as a forced entry where the deadbolt was bent or the knob lock was broken, rekeying alone will not fix the problem. The lock cylinder might still be functional, but if the housing is cracked or the bolt no longer aligns with the strike plate, you need a full replacement. In that situation, a locksmith will usually recommend replacing the entire lock set and then keying the new locks alike so that one key works all the doors.

Another edge case is if the lockout was caused by a key breaking off inside the keyway. A locksmith can extract the broken piece, but the cylinder might have internal damage from the extraction. Rekeying can sometimes solve that if the cylinder is still intact, but if the keyway is scored or the pins are bent, a new cylinder is the safer bet.

How to decide if you need to rekey

Here are a few practical checkpoints to run through after a lockout:

- Were your keys out of your sight for any period of time? If a stranger had them, even briefly, rekeying is wise.
- Did the locksmith use a bump key or aggressive picking to open the lock? That can weaken the security pins.
- Do you have spare keys floating around with neighbors, family, or previous tenants? Those copies still work unless you rekey.
- Is the lock older than five years? The bitting may already be worn, and a rekey will give you fresh pins and a cleaner keyway.
- Are your locks from different brands? If you have a mix of Schlage, Kwikset, and Baldwin, a locksmith can key them all to the same key through rekeying, which

simplifies your daily life.

Rekeying as part of your overall home security

In Los Angeles, where rental turnover is high and many homes have been through multiple tenants, the lock cylinders on your doors might be original to the building. A lockout can be the reminder you need to check whether your locks have been rekeyed since the last tenant moved out. If you cannot verify that, the previous tenant might still have keys that work. Rekeying after a lockout solves that problem definitively.



Some people worry that rekeying is complicated or expensive, but it is one of the more straightforward jobs a locksmith does. The whole process usually takes less than half an hour per lock, and the new keys are cut on the spot. If you have multiple doors, a good locksmith can key them alike so you carry one key for the whole house. That is something you cannot do with a full lock replacement unless you buy matched sets.

The bottom line on rekeying after a lockout

Every lockout is a small disruption, but it also gives you a chance to improve your setup. Choosing to rekey after lockout is not about being paranoid. It is about closing a door that was opened, sometimes literally, sometimes just in terms of access. A fresh set of keys and a re-

pinned cylinder cost relatively little compared to the peace of mind they buy. And if you ever find yourself locked out again, you will be glad that the only keys that work are the ones in your pocket.

Whether you have a standard knob lock from Kwikset, a heavy deadbolt from Schlage, or a high-security Medeco cylinder, a locksmith can handle the rekey. The key is to call someone who knows the brand and has the right tools. Emergency services in Los Angeles see this situation every day, and most of them can rekey on the spot if you ask. It is one of those small decisions that pays off every time you turn your key in the lock and it works exactly as it should.