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Guidance

# COVID-19: guidance for employees

Updated 23 March 2020

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## **Staying at home**

If you have symptoms of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home and do not leave your house for 7 days from when your symptoms started.

If you live with others and you are the first in the household to have symptoms of coronavirus, then you must stay at home for 7 days, but all other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

See the stay at home guidance for more information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>).

## **Sick pay**

You can get £94.25 per week Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) if you're too ill to work. It's paid by your employer for up to 28 weeks.

If you are staying at home because of COVID-19 you can now claim SSP. This includes individuals who are caring for people in the same household and therefore have been advised to do a household quarantine.

To check your sick pay entitlement, you should talk to your employer, and visit the Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) page (<https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay>) for more information.

## **SSP start date**

We are legislating for SSP to be paid from day 1, rather than day 4, of your absence from work if you are absent from work due to sickness or need to stay at home due to COVID-19. Once the legislation has been passed, this will apply retrospectively from 13 March. You should talk to your employer if you are eligible for SSP and need to claim.

## **Proof of sickness**

If you have COVID-19 or are advised to stay at home, you can get an 'isolation note' by visiting NHS 111 online (<https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>), rather than visiting a doctor. For COVID-19 cases this replaces the usual need to provide a 'fit note' (sometimes called a 'sick note') after 7 days of sickness absence.

Isolation notes will also be accepted by Jobcentre Plus as evidence of your inability to attend.

## **If you're self-employed or not eligible for SSP**

If you are not eligible for SSP – for example if you are self-employed or earning below the Lower Earnings Limit of £118 per week – and you have COVID-19 or are advised to stay at home, you can now more easily make a claim for Universal Credit

(<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>) or new style Employment and Support Allowance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-style-employment-and-support-allowance>).

If you are eligible for new style Employment and Support Allowance, it will now be payable from day 1 of sickness, rather than day 8, if you have COVID-19 or are advised to stay at home.

## **Furloughed workers**

If your employer cannot cover staff costs due to COVID-19, they may be able to access support to continue paying part of your wage (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses#support-for-businesses-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>), to avoid redundancies.

If your employer intends to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, they will discuss with you becoming classified as a furloughed worker. This would mean that you are kept on your employer's payroll, rather than being laid off.

To qualify for this scheme, you should not undertake work for them while you are furloughed. This will allow your employer to claim a grant of up to 80% of your wage for all employment costs, up to a cap of £2,500 per month.

You will remain employed while furloughed. Your employer could choose to fund the differences between this payment and your salary, but does not have to.

If your salary is reduced as a result of these changes, you may be eligible for support through the welfare system, including Universal Credit.

We intend for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to run for at least 3 months from 1 March 2020, but will extend if necessary.

## **Claiming benefits**

Whether you are currently in or out of work, if you are on a low income and affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19, you will be able to access the full range of the welfare system, including Universal Credit.

From 6 April we are increasing the standard allowance in Universal Credit and the basic element in Working Tax Credit for 1 year. Both will increase by £20 per week on top of planned annual uprating. This will apply to all new and existing Universal Credit claimants and to existing Working Tax Credit claimants.

### **If you have COVID-19 or are staying at home**

You are now able to claim Universal Credit (<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>), and if required can access advance payments upfront without needing to attend a jobcentre.

### **If you are self-employed**

You are able to claim Universal Credit (<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>), providing you meet the usual eligibility criteria.

To support you with the economic impact of the outbreak, and allow you to follow government guidance on self-isolation and social distancing, from 6 April the requirements of the Minimum Income Floor will be temporarily relaxed. This change will apply to all Universal Credit claimants and will last for the duration of the outbreak.

New claimants will not need to attend the jobcentre to demonstrate gainful self-employment.

### **Support for rent costs**

You should check your eligibility for Universal Credit (<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>), which is available for people in and out of work. Support for rental costs will be paid through Universal Credit.

From April, we are increasing Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile of market rents. This applies to all private renters who are new or existing Universal Credit housing element claimants and to existing Housing Benefit claimants.