

COVID19 – Benefits – Further Information

1. Statutory Sick Pay entitlement to be temporarily extended. The government has already announced that people who are off sick because of the coronavirus will be able to claim Statutory Sick Pay (if they are employed and entitled) from Day 1 rather than Day 4 for those who have COVID-19 or must self-isolate in accordance with Government guidelines.
2. Statutory Sick Pay entitlement will be temporarily widened to cover individuals who are unable to work because they have been advised to self-isolate and those who are caring for those within the same household who display COVID-19 symptoms and have been told to self-isolate.
3. Statutory Sick Pay is £94.25 (increasing to £95.85 in April) per week. Employed claimants with little other resources will need to make claims for Universal Credit for help with housing costs and council tax reduction.
4. The government has already issued guidance to employers advising them to use their discretion about not requiring a GP fit note for COVID-19 related absences. NHS will bring a temporary alternative to fit note during the next few weeks which employees will be able to be used during the COVID-19 outbreak. This will enable those who are advised to self-isolate to obtain this notice from NHS111 which can be used as evidence for absence from work.
5. The Coronavirus Job Retention scheme. This allows employers to put staff who can't work on 'furlough' – i.e., on hold - and the Government will cover their salary. Think of this like a job being put on standby. The idea is you go into sleeper mode during the crisis, and then when it's over, they can instantly restart things and get the economy running again. It's up to your employer to decide and define who is furloughed. It could be because you've no work to do, but it can also be as you must be home to look after children or you're self-isolating. While the Government said it will cover 80% of the wages of 'retained' employees, it'll be capped at a maximum of £2,500/month per employee, and the money will be issued through grants which can be paid out to any employer.
6. The government has also increased funding in the Scottish Welfare fund. If you are in a crisis and require immediate assistance, please contact your Local Authority to request a crisis grant or community care grant.
7. For the self-employed, Contributory (New Style) Employment Support Allowance (ESA) will be available from day 1 rather than day 8 for those affected by the coronavirus or self-isolating. Those not entitled to Statutory Sick Pay – for example, those who are self-employed and those whose earnings are below the Lower Earnings Limit (£118 per week) would have to claim Contributory (New Style) Employment and Support Allowance and/or Universal Credit. The Budget today announced measures to help claim these benefits quicker.
 - i. New-style ESA for those directly affected by COVID-19 or self-isolating according to government advice is payable from day 1 rather than day 8.

- ii. People who need to claim Universal Credit if they are directly affected by COVID-19 or are self-isolating will be able to do so without attending the Jobcentre
 - iii. The Minimum Income Floor (an assumed level of income) will be 'temporarily relaxed' for those claiming Universal Credit who are self-employed during the duration of the outbreak for those directly affected by COVID-19 or self-isolating.
8. The Self-Employed Income Support Scheme was announced. This means the government will pay self-employed a grant of 80% of their average monthly profits over the last 3 years - up to £2,500 a month, to help them cope with coronavirus crisis. Support will initially last three months. You must have a tax return for 2018/2019 to be eligible. This is open to anyone with trading profits up to £50,000 and it will cover 95% of self-employed people. Those eligible will be contacted by HMRC – do not contact them. Access to scheme should be no later than June 2020 until then if you require immediate help then you will need to claim Universal credit.
9. Self-employed may be able to claim ESA New Style and Universal Credit. Those already on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction will need to inform of a change of income.
10. Small businesses owners can also access the business support grant from your Local Authority. Grants starting from £10,000 are available if you are a small business owner. For more information contact <https://www.mygov.scot/non-domestic-rates-coronavirus>
11. People will be able to claim Universal Credit and access advance payments online without the current requirement to attend the jobcentre. Please note that advance payments are interest free loans which needs to be paid back.
12. An increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element by £20 per week for one year from 6 April 2020. An increase in the Local Housing Allowance rates for private renters claiming Universal Credit housing element or Housing benefit so they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents.