NATIONAL DEBTLINE

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0808 808 4000
www.nationaldebtline.org

England & Wales edition

Coronavirus advice and support

Fact sheet no. 74 Coronavirus advice and support

March 2020

The outbreak of coronavirus means that you may need to 'self-isolate'. This means you might have to stay at home to avoid spreading the virus. This may impact on your ability to work, how much you earn, or stop you from doing things you normally need to do to claim benefits.

The Government and banks have said they will offer help to people if they are diagnosed with coronavirus and need to self-isolate. If you need more information about the symptoms of coronavirus, or advice about avoiding infection, go to the **NHS website**.

You may get other kinds of help if you are self-employed. **Business Debtline** can give you more information, see **www.businessdebtline.org**.

At risk of redundancy?

The Government has announced a job retention scheme which may be able to prevent the need for your employer to make you redundant. You would be classed as a furloughed worker, which means you are kept on your employer's payroll, rather than being laid off. Under the scheme:

- HMRC will pay 80% of your wages to your employer who can then pay this to you;
- a maximum of £2.5k per month can be paid;
- the pay can be back dated to 1 march 2020;
- your employer can look to claim the money for three months, this may be extended.

If your employer has said that they may have to make you redundant as they can't afford your wage, ask them to contact HMRC to discuss the sceme and see if it can help.

Even if your employer has already made you redundant, ask them about whether they could consider using this scheme instead.

In work and need to self-isolate?

The Government has announced changes to **Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)** for people affected by coronavirus who have to self-isolate. SSP will now be paid from the first day of sickness rather than the usual fourth day of sickness. You will also be able to claim SSP if you are caring for someone within the same household who shows symptoms of coronavirus and has been told to self-isolate. More information can be found on the **GOV.UK** website.

- SSP is **£94.25** per week and can be paid for up to **28 weeks**. To qualify, a worker must earn at least **£118** per week.

If you are not eligible to receive SSP you can claim Universal Credit and/or contributory Employment and Support Allowance.

- **Contributory Employment and support allowance** can now be claimed from day **one** of illness.
- If you are claiming **Universal Credit**, you can do so without having to attend a jobcentre if you have been advised to self-isolate.

Visit **Turn2us** for more information about benefits and how to claim them.

Check insurance policies

Check if you have an insurance policy which could increase your income or cover payments on essential items such as your mortgage. Contact the insurer to see what help you may be able to receive. You may have:

- Payment protection insurance;
- Mortgage payment protection insurance; or
- Accident, sickness or unemployment insurance.

Already claiming benefits?

If you are claiming Universal Credit you may need to meet certain requirements to continue to receive the benefit. This could be job searching, periods of time at work, or attending regular meetings or assessments.

If you are too ill to carry out any task, you should phone the office paying the benefit to explain why you can't go. There will be no requirement for people self-isolating to attend a job centre to claim benefits. It can be done over the phone instead.

The Government has confirmed that if you are claiming sickness and disability benefits you will no longer need to attend face-to-face assessments for the next **three months**. This will apply if you receive Personal Independence Payments (PIP), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Industrial Injuries Disability Benefit and possibly Universal Credit.

Special arrangements will be in place if you are in receipt of benefits and cannot attend reassessments or jobcentre appointments because you are required to stay at home or are infected by coronavirus. For example:

- if you are disabled or sick and cannot attend a reassessment for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit you will continue to receive your payments while your assessment is rearranged; and
- if you need to claim ESA or Universal Credit because of coronavirus you will not be required to produce a fit note.

You can find more details on **GOV.UK**.

New claimants will also no longer need face-to-face assessments. More information can be found on the **GOV.UK** website.

The Government has also announced that :

- if you are affected by coronavirus you will be able to apply for Universal Credit and you can receive up to a month's advance up front without physically attending a jobcentre; and
- the 7 waiting days for ESA for new claimants will not apply if you are suffering from coronavirus or are required to stay at home – so it will be payable from day one.

Important:

if you are already claiming Universal Credit

Make sure you explain in your online journal why you haven't been unable to attend as expected.

The Government has temporarily changed the way they work out Universal Credit for self-employed people on low incomes. You can contact the Universal Credit helpline on **0800 328 5644** for more information.

Benefit increases

From 6 April 2020 the standard allowance in Universal credit and the basic element in Working Tax Credit will be increased by **£20** per week. This will apply to new and existing claimants. The exact amount you will receive will depend on your situation.

If you rent privately the maximum amount of help you can receive through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit has been increased to **30%** of the average rents in all areas of the UK. This is called the Local Housing Allowance.

To find out more about how these changes may help you, please visit Turn2us. They have a **benefit calculator** to help you find out if and how much you may be able to claim.

Your bank may be able to help

Many lenders including TSB, Lloyds, Halifax, Bank of Scotland, NatWest and Royal Bank of Scotland have said that it may be possible for their customers to receive a payment holiday if they are struggling to pay their mortgage as a result of coronavirus.

Even if your bank isn't mentioned above, you should contact them to explain your situation. Each bank will consider what help it may give case by case. Give them a call to see if they can help you.

Some banks are also offering possible payment holidays on loan and credit-card payments or allowing people to access their fixed-savings accounts without a penalty. Again speak to your bank, explain your situation and see how they can help.

Avoid taking out more credit unless you know that you can afford to pay it back.

The Government has announced that if you are affected by the coronavirus and struggle to pay your mortgage you may be able to receive a three month payment holiday. This means you will not have to make repayment for three months, interest however will continue to accrue during this time. Speak to your bank to see if this may be an option.

Help with your mortgage

- Your lender will look at your individual circumstances and offer support on a case-by-case basis.
- You will need to make up the payments that have been deferred; this could be over the remaining term of the mortgage.
- You can only get a payment holiday if you are not already in arrears and are up to date with payments.
- If a payment holiday is agreed then it should not affect you credit rating.

Help to Buy customers

The Government has confirmed a possible three month repayment holiday if you have been affected by the coronavirus and have Help to Buy loans.

For more details contact the Help to Buy: Equity Loan administrator on **0345 848 0236**. if the loan was taken out in wales you should contact **Help to Buy (Wales) Ltd** on **029 2080 3451**.

Help with your rent

Landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a three-month period. As a result of this, you should be protected against risk of eviction.

At the end of the three month period, you will need work with your landlord to establish an affordable repayment plan, your landlord should take your circumstances in to account.

The government will also issue guidance which asks landlords to show compassion and to allow tenants who are affected by this to remain in their homes wherever possible.

Contact your landlord as soon as possible to discuss any concerns you may have.

If your landlord is unhelpful and you need more support, contact **Shelter** on **0808 800 4444**.

Extra advice if you are in Scotland

The **Housing and Property Chamber** has postponed all scheduled hearings, they are due to restart from **28 May 2020**. This means if a decision to evict you has not already been made, you can't be evicted from your property before this date.

If you have a case that has been postponed, you will be notified when you should attend the Tribunal.

The Scottish Government has announced extra protection if you are unable to pay your rent because of a delay or failure in the payment welfare benefits. Protection from eviction will be increased from **three** to **six months**.

More information can be found on the **GOV.SCOT** website.

If your landlord is unhelpful and you need more support, contact **Shelter Scotland** on **0808 800 4444**.

Help from your energy provider

Energy providers have agreed that the disconnection of credit meters will be **completely suspended**. Also, if you are self-isolating and unable to top up your pre-payment meter, you can;

- nominate a third party for credit top ups,
- have a discretionary fund added to your credit, or
- have a pre-loaded top up card sent so that your supply is not interrupted.

If you are struggling to manage repayments to your energy provider contact them to see what help they can provide. New guidance means that your debt repayments and bill payments could be reassessed, reduced or paused where necessary.

More information can be found on the **GOV.UK** website.

If you are a vulnerable person, you could ask your energy provider to place you on the **Priority Services Register**. The Priority Services Register can help to make sure that you receive all the appropriate support you need. You can find out who may be classed as vulnerable and what help is available by visiting **Ofgem**.

Debt advice

To get personal advice on how to deal with your debts, use our **Digital Advice Tool**. Tell us about your situation and your debts, and our tool will advise you on the solutions suitable for you.

Visit **nationaldebtline.org** and click 'Get started' in the 'Find debt solutions' box.

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