

Coronavirus e-news: practical information for disabled people

At Disability Rights UK we are well aware that the outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) is causing great uncertainty and stress among our community. Alongside our regular e-news round up, we will also be sending you some e-newsletters on Coronavirus – this one provides information on and links to government and institutional guidance, and another will focus on policy around the virus, with particular relevance to disabled people.

This information is also available on our website: www.disabilityrightsuk.org/coronavirus

Updates to this information will be posted to the link above.

General guidance on Coronavirus

An easy read guide to Coronavirus can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874281/COVID-19_easy_read.pdf

A comprehensive guide to the latest government guidance, topic by topic, can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Information on symptoms, what the virus does, and what to do if you think you may have it, can be found here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Citizens Advice has also issued guidance for people needing help at this time. You can find it here:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/welfare-policy-research-surveys-and-consultation-responses/welfare-policy-research/helping-people-through-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

And here: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/>

Social welfare law updates can be found here:

<https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/covid19>

Social distancing

You will almost certainly be aware that Public Health England is advising vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and long-term health conditions, to practice social distancing. New guidance from the NHS for those at greatest risk is expected this week. For the current guidance on social distancing, go here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has urged vulnerable groups to isolate for 12 weeks in a “period of maximum protection” from the weekend which has just passed. While this is not yet mandatory, it is very strongly advised. You can hear him speaking about this from five minutes ten seconds in on this youtube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTC8-og9W3Q>

Benefits

Face to face benefits assessments have been cancelled for (at least) three months. More information can be found here:

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2020/march/face-face-benefits-appointments-cancelled>

The Government's has published guidance on Statutory Sick Pay, job centre appointments, health assessment appointments, changes to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits, Local Housing Allowances and Housing Benefit here:

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

For the first seven days off work, employees can self-certify so they don't need any evidence for their employer. After that, employers may ask for evidence of sickness absence. Where this is related to having symptoms of coronavirus or living with someone who has symptoms, the isolation note can be used to provide evidence of the advice to self-isolate.

People who need to claim universal credit or employment and support allowance because of coronavirus will not be required to produce a fit note or an isolation note.

In addition, the government advises that the note can be accessed through the NHS website and NHS 111 online, and that:

“After answering a few questions, an isolation note will be emailed to the user. If they don’t have an email address, they can have the note sent to a trusted family member or friend, or directly to their employer. The service can also be used to generate an isolation note on behalf of someone else.”

Other welfare benefit changes include:

- Increasing the universal credit standard allowance and the working tax credit basic element by £20 a week for the next 12 months.
- Suspending the minimum income floor for everyone affected by the economic impacts of coronavirus.
- The rule that means statutory sick pay (SSP) is not paid for the first three days of work missed because of sickness absence with (retrospective effect from 13 March 2020);
- Raising the ‘generosity’ of housing benefit and universal credit, so that the local housing allowance will cover at least 30% of market rents in an area.
- Removing the universal credit minimum income floor rule for the self employed.

New PIP, ESA and Attendance Allowance claimants will have priority for telephone and paper-based disability assessments to ensure access to support

The DWP has announced that there no requirement to attend jobcentre appointments for three months,

However, jobcentres will remain open and will continue to support people who cannot go online or use the phone to make claims or get support.

Turn2Us is a useful website to find out more about benefits:
<https://www.turn2us.org.uk/get-support/Benefits-and-Coronavirus-Sickness>

Housing

The Ministry of Housing and Communities has announced plans for emergency legislation to suspend evictions from social or private rented accommodation. More information about the announcement can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/complete-ban-on-evictions-and-additional-protection-for-renters>

Shopping

People classified as 'extremely vulnerable' can self-register for support (food parcels) here: https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable?fbclid=IwAR0ZciJdp3zC-6ZH8hDIWX2SO1_ijJWq4fexprK2e5Cr9fpbooEJLVON_mA

Some branches of some of the major supermarkets, including Sainsbury's, M&S, Asda, Morrison's and Tesco, are offering a quieter hour for shopping for vulnerable groups (older people, people with long-term health conditions, and disabled people). While the intention is there, concerns have been raised in the media that the queues are long and proximity to people too close to be considered isolating. If you are able to use the internet, online grocery shopping affords more isolation.

A round up of information from the major supermarkets can be found on the inews website. Please note that information is subject to change:

<https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/money/supermarket-opening-times-coronavirus-tesco-asda-sainsburys-morrisons-aldi-hours-2502402>

You can check for the latest information and find contact details for the major UK supermarkets on their websites.

Aldi: <https://www.aldi.co.uk/>

Asda: <https://www.asda.com/>

Best-One: <https://www.best-one.co.uk/>

Budgens: <https://www.budgens.co.uk/>

Co-Op: <https://www.coop.co.uk/>

Costco: <https://www.costco.co.uk/>

Costcutter: <https://www.costcutter.co.uk/>

Farmfoods: <https://www.farmfoods.co.uk/>

Iceland: <https://www.iceland.co.uk/>

Lidl: <https://www.lidl.co.uk/>

Londis: <https://www.londis.co.uk/>

Makro: <https://www.makro.co.uk/>

Marks and Spencer: <https://www.marksandspencer.com/>

Morrisons:

<https://groceries.morrisons.com/webshop/startWebshop.do>

Nisa: <https://www.nisalocally.co.uk/>

Ocado: <https://www.ocado.com/>

Premier: <https://www.premier-stores.co.uk/>

Sainsbury's: <https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/>

Sainsburys has a vulnerable persons careline - 0800 052 5500. It is attempting to prioritise vulnerable customers for home delivery.

Call wait times may be substantial.

Spar: <https://www.spar.co.uk/>

Tesco: <https://www.tesco.com/>

Waitrose: <https://www.waitrose.com/>

Utilities

Energy companies have agreed emergency measures to ensure vulnerable people do not get cut off at this time. Details on energy

company measures can be found here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51958920>

and water company measures here:

<https://wwtonline.co.uk/news/water-sector-responds-to-coronavirus-outbreak->

Medical and NHS services

In the case of GP surgeries closing due to Coronavirus or short staffing, NHS out of hours advice still stands. This can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/urgent-and-emergency-care/nhs-out-of-hours-services/>

Information on support from your pharmacy can be found here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/pharmacies/>

Hospitals are cancelling non-essential appointments, and publishing their own guidance on Coronavirus on their websites. Check before travelling.

You can find a list of NHS Trusts linking to websites here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/pages/nhstrustlisting.aspx>

You can find a list of Clinical Commissioning Groups linking to websites here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/pages/ccglisting.aspx>

General NHS information on Coronavirus can be found here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

NHS England has put out the following comprehensive guidance to the Heads of Clinical Commissioning Groups and NHS Trusts across the country, determining which services should continue to run, which should run with limited capacity, and which will need to be discontinued during the outbreak:

https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/COVID-19-prioritisation-within-community-health-services-with-annex_19-March-2020.pdf

Social care

The government has published guidance on home care provision

here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19->

[residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance/covid-19-guidance-on-home-care-provision](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care/ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care)

And adult social care here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care/ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care?fbclid=IwAR0avXPoMZ2zW-4GpnJIWCOv0tOeXrC0Px0RZO6wphFXvHlu82tuOTtqrLQ>

Last week, the In Control charity ran a webinar on social care and direct payments during the Coronavirus outbreak:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Tii17_p48Y (note this link is to a youtube video, you cannot actively participate now as the event has passed).

In Control has set up a web page on its Be Human initiative, which links to local facebook Coronavirus support groups, as well as other resources created by Disabled People's Groups: <https://be-human.org.uk/coronaheroes/>

While we know it is a challenging time for everyone at the moment due to Coronavirus. Disabled people are still entitled to the care and support they receive from their Local Authorities to promote their independence, safety and wellbeing. Disabled people are also entitled to be adequately assessed in order to ensure proper person-centred care needs are met, and assessment and care and support plans are written. Assessment and care and support plans can be undertaken without face to face meetings.

We have produced a Care Act Guide that can be downloaded for free from: <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/care-act-guide>

Education

Schools are closed, with the exception of need for keyworkers and vulnerable children. Details of who is eligible to attend school can be found in this BBC article: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51643556>

Government advice on SEND schools is wooly:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

If you are in doubt about what to do with a child who attends a SEND setting, contact your local authority.

Coram Children's Legal Centre has some useful advice for SEND provision at this time which can be found here:

<https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/coronavirus-impact-sen/>

Employment

Support for self-employed people is so far minimal. If you're self-employed, claiming Universal Credit and having to stay at home because of COVID-19, the minimum income floor rules do not apply. From 6 April there will be a "temporary relaxation" of minimum income floor rules, and self-employed people claiming Universal Credit will not have to attend job centre appointments to demonstrate what their work is. There has been additional support promised for self-employed workers but no details yet.

If you're self-isolating due to COVID-19 you can get SSP from day one off work, rather than day four. There have been plans announced to support the income of people out of work due to COVID-19 through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, but that does not cover self-employed workers, and is applied for employers. If you're not eligible for statutory sick pay you can apply for Universal Credit and/or Employment and Support Allowance.

The government has issued information for employees here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>

and information for employers here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Public transport

Some local councils have eased the terms of use for free bus passes, allowing people to use them on all buses, not just on those after the morning rush hour. This potentially allows people to access the early morning hour of shopping reserved at the major supermarkets for vulnerable groups. However, while isolation is not yet compulsory, these groups are being strongly advised to self-isolate to avoid infection.

Rail routes will be running reduced services but will stay running to allow key workers, including NHS and care workers, to get to work.

Refunds will be issued for season tickets. People with passes will need to contact the pass issuer for details.

BBC output

The BBC intends to continue its remit to inform, educate and entertain during the outbreak. It has committed to keeping flagship news broadcasts on the air, to use The One Show as a consumer programme for all aspects of the crisis, including health and well-being advice, keeping fit and healthy eating tips, while Health Check UK Live will directly address the concerns of viewers who are in isolation, offering tips on how to keep healthy and happy at home. It will work to offer TV and radio fitness programmes, and use the BBC Food website to focus on what meals can be made with essentials, for those on low incomes.

It has also given the Red Button service a reprieve for the time being.

It has pledged to keep spirits up with repeats of favourite shows on the TV, and iPlayer, as well as launching a new iPlayer experience for children, part of which will focus on education. Read more here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2020/bbc-keeping-nation-informed-educated-entertained>

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