

Covid-19 (Coronavirus) and Benefits

Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey MLA announced on the 16th March measures to ensure the continued delivery of important social security services, in light of the escalating issues around COVID-19.

For those receiving benefits:

Attending appointments/assessments

All appointments at local Jobs & Benefits offices have been postponed from 16 March. If you are due to sign-on for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Universal Credit (UC), you will be excused from signing. **For those already receiving benefits, you will continue to receive your payments** and rather than attend the office for routine appointments for UC, Work Coaches will communicate with you via your on-line journal, the phone, or will simply re-schedule appointments for a later date. Nobody will be penalised for not attending the office.

Face-to-face assessments for all benefits will be suspended for a period of 3 months from 16 March. Assessments for benefits will be carried out by telephone, or by considering medical evidence submitted by post. If you already have an appointment for assessment scheduled, you will be contacted to cancel your appointment.

Universal Credit

New claims to Universal Credit will still be made on-line. All follow up activities that would ordinarily have been undertaken in the office, will be managed on-line or over the phone. Nobody will have to visit the office at any stage of making their new claim, except in exceptional circumstances. If you are unable to make your claim online, please telephone the Universal Credit Helpline on 0800 012 1331. Existing claimants can still contact your Work Coach via your online journal at, <https://www.gov.uk/sign-in-universal-credit> or by phone if necessary.

If you're already claiming Universal Credit and think you may have been affected by COVID-19 (coronavirus), please contact your Work Coach as soon as possible. You can do this via your online journal <https://www.gov.uk/sign-in-universal-credit>

If you are in work and already claiming Universal Credit, and are self-isolating, you should report this in the usual way via your online journal. If this means you are working fewer hours, the amount of Universal Credit you receive will adjust as your earnings change.

The Minimum Income will not be applied if you have been affected by COVID-19.

Personal Independence Payment

Face to face assessments will be suspended for a period of 3 months from 16 March. If you are claiming or considering claiming PIP all medical assessments will be carried out by telephone or by considering medical evidence submitted by post. **If you have are waiting on an assessment and you have additional medical evidence which could be beneficial to your claim, please submit this at your earliest convenience. You can send this to:**

PIP MOU, PO Box 42, Limavady, BT49 4AN

Jobseekers' Allowance

All appointments at local Jobs & Benefits offices have been postponed. If you are due to sign-on you will be excused from signing. **If you are already receiving benefits, you will continue to receive your payments.**

Employment & Support Allowance (ESA)

All appointments at local Jobs & Benefits offices have been postponed. If you have an assessment appointment scheduled, you will be contacted by the Department. Assessments for all benefits will be carried out by telephone, or by considering medical evidence submitted by post. **If you have are waiting on an assessment and you have additional medical evidence which could be beneficial to your claim, please submit this at your earliest convenience. You can send this to:**

Belfast MSC, 1st Floor, 29-31 Alfred Street, Metropolitan Building, Belfast BT2 8ED

Finance Support

If you are in a crisis situation you can apply for financial help by contacting the Department's Finance Support service on 0800 587 2750 (Freephone) or 0800 587 2751 (textphone for customers with hearing difficulties).

If you are claiming Universal Credit, you can also apply for a Universal Credit Contingency Fund grant by contacting the Finance Support service and choosing option 2.

Arrangements have also been put in place to avoid anyone claiming Discretionary Support from having to call into their local office as part of that claim. Telephone number 0800 587 2750 (Freephone) or 0800 587 2751 (textphone for customers with hearing difficulties) to make a claim.

If you're in work (includes those who are self-employed) and not claiming benefits

If you work on a short-term or a zero hours contract, you may be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay. You check your eligibility for Statutory Sick Pay by clicking the link below:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/apply-statutory-sick-pay>

If **you are not eligible** to receive Statutory Sick Pay you can apply for Universal Credit and/or New Style Employment & Support Allowance.

Anyone self-isolating who is self-employed can apply for Universal Credit or new-style Employment & Support Allowance. You can also apply for these if you are prevented from working because of a risk to public health.

Making a new claim to Universal Credit and/or new style Employment & Support Allowance

You can apply for Universal Credit online and ESA by telephone. If you need to make an appointment, call the number you are given when you submit your claim, and explain the situation. If you need to self-isolate, they will be able to provide help and support.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), you will be treated as having limited capability for work from the start of your claim without a fit note, an assessment or some form of statutory public health notice.

Anyone who is self-isolating and are self-employed or who works on a short-term contract can apply for Universal Credit or new-style Employment and Support Allowance, **during the period of self-isolation.**

For more information on Universal Credit use the link below

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/claim-universal-credit-online>

You can make a claim Universal Credit by clicking on the link below

<https://www.universal-credit.service.gov.uk/postcode-checker>

For more information on Employment and Support Allowance use the link below

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/employment-and-support-allowance>

You can make a new claim for Employment and Support by telephone on 08000856318, textphone on 08003283419. You can phone or textphone the ESA Centre and an adviser will talk through the application with you and fill in the form on your behalf

You can download the application form from the link below. There are also guidance notes to read before filling in the claim form.

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/employment-and-support-allowance-claim-form-esa1>

If you or a member of your family needs additional help with any of the information provided above please contact our Welfare Advice Coordinator, Áine Malone on 07739876126 or via email on aine@relativesforjustice.com