

Advice for employed workers during COVID-19 emergency

What is the Job Retention Scheme?

If you are employed but your employer is unable to pay your wage or salary due to the current emergency, they can apply for assistance from the Government. This scheme started from 1 March and was initially planned to end at the end of June 2020. It was extended until the end of October 2020, and then again for a further period until 30 April 2021. Claims for furlough days in December had to be made by 14 January 2021.

You do not have to have been part of the scheme before 30th October 2020 to be included in it now. However, you do need to have been employed on 30th October 2020 and have been part of your employer's payroll submission to HMRC between 20 March 2020 and 30 October 2020.

If your employer is accessing the Job Retention Scheme, this means that you are kept on your employer's payroll, rather than being laid off. You continue to be an employee and retain your statutory and contractual employment rights. 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. Your employer could choose to fund the differences between this payment and your salary, but does not have to.

There is information for employees on the government website:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/worker-support#furloughed-workers>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-could-be-covered-by-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

If your salary has reduced as a consequence of being furloughed you may want to consider claiming additional means tested benefits. Which benefits are available to you will depend on your household circumstances.

Can I claim New-Style Jobseeker's Allowance?

New-style Jobseekers Allowance (NSJSA) is a contribution-based benefit paid to jobseekers who are available for and actively seeking work. NSJSA can be paid for up to 26 weeks. You must meet the National Insurance Contribution conditions. If you have been employed for the last two complete tax years this is likely to be the case.

You can't claim NSJSA if you are in full-time work. This usually means working 16 hours or more per week. If your hours have been cut and you are looking for more work, it might be possible for you to claim NSJSA if your weekly earnings are less than what you would receive from NSJSA plus £5, ie: £74.35 + £5 from April 2020/21. Any payment of NSJSA would be reduced by earnings.

There is a requirement for those claiming NSJSA to agree a claimant commitment to be looking for work.

There may be circumstances in which both NSJSA and a means tested 'top-up' of Universal Credit (UC) can be paid together, for instance when the claimant is living with a partner and/or child or where there are housing costs which can be included in the claim. NSJSA will count as unearned income in a Universal Credit calculation. This means it will reduce the award of UC pound for pound. You will not be financially better off overall from claiming NS-JSA but, it will give you a different stream of income that is paid 2-weekly rather than monthly. It might also help to protect your National Insurance record for the future. If you are not claiming UC, or cannot claim because your savings are above £16,000 it will give you additional income. See below for more information on Universal Credit.

Am I entitled to Statutory Sick Pay?

If your normal weekly earnings are £120 per week or more, employees are paid Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) by their employers if they cannot work because they are off sick. The waiting period before SSP is payable has been removed for employees who are:

- a) Sick, displaying symptoms or have tested positive for Coronavirus
- b) Isolating to prevent infection or contamination because they, or someone in their household (including an extended or linked household), has symptoms or has tested positive for Coronavirus
- c) Employees who have an NHS "shielding" letter that covers the current period
- d) Have been advised by the NHS or public health authority to isolate because they have come into contact with someone who has Coronavirus
- e) Isolating before being admitted to hospital for planned or elective surgery and a doctor or health clinician has advised this

You cannot claim SSP if you are in quarantine on return to the UK from abroad, unless any of the above also applies to you.

The normal requirement to have a sick note from your GP after the first 7 days of illness has been changed. SSP will be paid from day one of your sickness/self-isolation if it relates to Covid-19, and you are self-isolating for at least 4 days. For the first seven days off work, you can self-certify so you don't need any evidence for your employer. Continue to follow your employer's requirements about how to let them know that you are off sick and/or self-isolating.

After 7 days, your employer 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. You can access the note at [111 Isolation Note](#). After answering a few questions, an isolation note will be emailed to you. If you don't have an email address the note can be sent to a trusted family member or friend, or directly to your employer. The service can also be used to generate an isolation note on behalf of someone else.

Once the circumstances that allow you to claim SSP have ended, e.g. you are no longer self-isolating, you can return to work. You cannot be furloughed and claim SSP. Details about Self Isolation can be found here [Self Isolation guidance](#)

If you are returning from abroad and have been told to quarantine, you cannot claim SSP unless any of the above conditions also apply to you - for example you have symptoms of Coronavirus or have been told to isolate.

Should I claim New-Style ESA if I can't receive SSP or my Statutory Sick Pay has ended?

Once Statutory Sick Pay has ended, or if you are not entitled to SSP, a New-Style Employment and Support Allowance (NESA) claim may be possible if you are still sick or continue to be self-isolating provided you meet the NI contribution conditions. Ask your employer for an SSP1 - but do not delay your claim until you have it. Initially the rate of NESA is lower than SSP and remains lower if you are assessed to have only Limited Capability for Work (LCW) and not Limited Capability for Work Related Activity (LCWRA). It will be higher than SSP if you are assessed to have LCWRA.

There are normally 7 waiting days for NS-ESA unless you were getting SSP prior to your claim. Regulations issued during the current COVID-19 emergency have removed the waiting days for NS-ESA if you are unable to work for any of the same reasons as allow you to receive SSP:

- a) Infected or contaminated by COVID-19;
- b) Isolating to prevent infection or contamination with Coronavirus disease;
- c) Caring for a child or qualifying young person who is a member of a household where someone is infected or isolating as in a) or b)

You may be able to claim NESA if you are a person who has been told to stay at home by the NHS because you are at high risk of serious illness from Covid-19 (shielded group). If you have been getting NESA as a person who is shielding, and the shielding period ends, you will need to meet other criteria to continue your NESA claim - for example you have Coronavirus, you are self isolating or you have a Fit Note from your GP saying that you cannot work.

You will need to provide evidence of your limited capability for work during your claim. The evidence requirements vary depending on which of the above groups you are in.

- an 'isolation note' if you're unable to work because of coronavirus ([111 Isolation Note](#))
- your notification from the NHS or public health authorities if you've been told to self-isolate because you've come into contact with someone with coronavirus
- a letter confirming the date of your procedure if you've been advised to self-isolate before going into hospital for surgery
- a letter or 'shielding note' from your doctor or a health authority advising you or your child to shield (take extra precautions to reduce contact with others) because you're at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus

NSESA can be backdated for up to 3 months if you have met the entitlement conditions throughout that period. It also helps to protect your National Insurance record for the future. If you are not claiming UC, or cannot claim because your savings are above £16,000 it will give you additional income.

I was doing Permitted Work and that has stopped. How does this affect me?

If you are receiving ESA and doing permitted work you are likely to be worse off if your permitted work ends. You may need to inform the DWP of the change in your circumstances, but as all income from permitted work is ignored for calculating both income-based ESA and Housing Benefit it will not change the ESA or Housing Benefit award you are receiving. You may benefit from the Job Retention Scheme if you are furloughed. Payments under the furlough scheme are paid by your employer and should continue to be disregarded. A claim for Universal Credit is unlikely to provide you with more income and, if made, will end your income-based ESA award, your Housing Benefit award if you have one, and any Child Tax Credit award that is in place. You can check that you are not better off receiving UC using one of the available online calculators. You should also consider seeking specific advice from an advice organisation such as Citizens Advice.

Is there anything else I can claim if I need more money?

If you are already claiming means tested benefits, such as Housing Benefit and/or Tax Credits you may be better off staying on these benefits. The rates should change when you inform the Local authority or HMRC of the change in your circumstances, such as being furloughed on reduced earnings.

You may be entitled to Universal Credit (UC) if you have no income, or as a top-up to your existing income that might include SSP, NSESA or reduced earnings. Your savings will have to be under £16,000.

A Universal Credit claim will end claims for Tax Credits and Housing Benefit. You will not be able to make a new Tax Credit or Housing Benefit claim in the future. Your Tax Credit claim will end the day before your UC claim. Your Housing Benefit claim will end two weeks after the UC claim.

How do I claim UC when I am unable to attend a Jobcentre Plus office?

Most Universal Credit claims are made online at <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-to-claim>. If you are a couple then you both need to claim (unless your partner is not entitled to make a claim usually because of their immigration status). Online calculators are available to enable you to work out if you are better off staying on legacy benefits or claiming Universal Credit.

The amount of Universal Credit you receive will depend upon your circumstances; for example, do you have children, do you have savings over £6,000, do you rent? Once your claim has been verified you can ask for an advance of your UC payment if you need to, otherwise it will be 5 weeks before it is paid. If you are currently affected by Coronavirus or are self-isolating you should not be required to attend the Jobcentre Plus office in person. You will be contacted about your claim - for most people contact with Jobcentre Plus will be on the telephone rather than face to face. You should be supported if you are required to stay at home. You can get an advance payment without having to attend the Jobcentre.

Will the Jobcentre Plus office ask me to look for work if I claim UC?

Normally a person without earnings who is not sick or disabled, or a Carer for a disabled person or a very young child, would be expected to look for work in return for being paid Universal Credit.

For UC there is a requirement to sign a claimant commitment and to undertake work related requirements, including work search. If you are a couple then you both need to claim and you will each have your own individual claimant commitment. This is unless your partner is not entitled to make a claim which is usually because of their immigration status.

The Jobcentre Plus office will tell you what they expect you to do in return for your benefit. The usual fortnightly “signing-on” in person for jobseekers is now being done remotely and interviews are being conducted by phone. If you are earning slightly more than the Universal Credit standard allowance then instead of claiming UC as a jobseeker you are likely to be claiming as an employed person on a low income. This should also mean you are not asked to look for work in return for your award of UC. If you are ill with Coronavirus, self-isolating or looking after children in your household who are self-isolating or ill, no jobseeking requirements should be imposed.

If you are unable to work because you are affected by Coronavirus and either sick, shielding or self-isolating, you will have to provide evidence of your limited capability for work in the same way as NSESA – see above.

I am claiming Housing Benefit and/or Tax Credits and my earnings have dropped

If you are currently receiving either Housing Benefit or Working Tax Credit, you will continue to receive them. Make sure that you let your local authority (for Housing Benefit) or HMRC (for Tax Credits) know about any changes in your income so that the amount that you are paid is correct. If you are currently receiving Working Tax Credit but your hours have dropped below those required for eligibility then HMRC has confirmed that you can continue to receive WTC until the end of the Job Retention Scheme period, even if you are not accessing that scheme. You must remain employed. The normal advice to keep HMRC informed of all other changes still applies including to childcare costs. Changes must be notified within one month of the change happening.

For the current tax year Working Tax Credits will include an additional £20 per week. There has been a corresponding increase in the earnings disregard for Housing Benefit.

How can I meet my rent or mortgage payments?

UC may help with your housing costs if you are renting your home. In most circumstances you can no longer make a new claim for Housing Benefit.

[Guidance for tenants](#)

If you have a mortgage, it would be wise to contact your mortgage provider and explain your circumstances. The government is encouraging mortgage companies to offer mortgage holidays (a temporary suspension of mortgage payments) to people whose income is affected by Coronavirus.

How can I pay my fuel bills?

Fuel companies are currently looking at ways to help people whose income is affected by the Coronavirus outbreak. The best advice at the moment is, if you are struggling to pay your fuel bills, get in touch with your provider and explain your situation. It is better to do this sooner than later. If possible contact them by email or on-line chat. If you have a prepaid key meter, most companies are looking at ways to help by, for example, adding credit remotely or posting pre-loaded cards/keys to your home. Any help given now will have to be repaid at an affordable rate later on.

Is there any financial help for paying Council Tax?

If you are struggling to pay your Council Tax, you can make a claim for Council Tax Support from your Local Authority. This can usually be done online. Many Local Authority websites have online calculators to help you work out whether you will be entitled to the benefit. Also check whether you are due any discounts on your Council Tax liability, for example if you are the only person living in

your property you should have a 25% discount on your bill. Local authorities have the power to give discretionary reductions on the basis of individual financial hardship.

The government has issued guidance on how to support vulnerable people using additional funding given to Local Authorities. Billing authorities are providing all working age Council Tax Support (CTS) recipients with a further reduction of £150 in their 2020/21 council tax bill. For any claimant whose liability is currently £150 or less this should mean their liability is reduced to nil. There should be no need for a person receiving CTS to make a separate claim for a reduction under this scheme. Eligibility for this further discount should be provided regardless of whether or not the recipients are directly or indirectly affected by the COVID-19 virus.

If you do not meet the criteria for an existing council tax reduction scheme but are in hardship as a result of current circumstances, your local council can look at your request for a discount based on your individual circumstances in addition to looking at entitlement under an existing scheme.

Where to get further advice

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/> For online advice and details of local phone and webchat services

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

Government information pages

<https://www.entitledto.co.uk/> Online benefit calculator

<https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk/> Online benefit calculator

This information is correct on 21 January 2021. When there are further announcements we will update this page.