

Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: Wednesday 25 March 2020

Have a question about coronavirus and how it will affect you? We've answered some of the most common questions below.

Why have you closed your offices?

As the risk of spreading the coronavirus grows we want to keep all of our customers and colleagues as safe as possible. We are following the advice from the government to delay the spread of the virus, minimise risk to you and to make sure the NHS can cope with demand during this time. Therefore we have made the difficult decision to close our offices from Thursday 19 March and from Wednesday 25 March will only be carrying out critical care services.

How will I know if I have coronavirus?

Diagnosis of coronavirus should only be given by a trained physician however common symptoms of the coronavirus include:

- Sudden onset fever/high fever
- Cough
- Headache
- Stuffy/runny nose
- Sore throat
- Muscle and joint pain, body aches, fatigue

What do I do if I think I have coronavirus or have been in contact with someone who could have it?

If you think you have been in contact with someone who could have contracted the coronavirus visit the [NHS 111 online website](#) to find out if you need medical help and seek advice on what to do next.

If you have symptoms you must stay at home for seven days and anyone in your household must not leave your home for 14 days from the day the first person got symptoms. You will also need to tell us if you have an appointment so we can rearrange it.

If your symptoms deteriorate, then call the NHS on 111.

How can I prevent transmission of coronavirus?

To help prevent the transmission of coronavirus, keep an eye on the latest government and NHS advice and take care of yourself by:

- Stay indoors unless absolutely necessary.
- The government says people should only leave their home for the following reasons:
 - Only shop for basic necessities such as food and medicine
 - One form of exercise a day, alone or with people you live with
 - For any medical need or to provide care or help to a vulnerable person – this includes moving children under 18 between parents' homes
 - Key workers or those with children identified as vulnerable can continue to take them to school
 - Travel to and from work where work cannot be done from home (e.g. key workers)
- Wash your hands frequently using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitising gel if soap is not available
- Keep a distance of at least two metres between yourself and other people
- Cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue or into your elbow
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth

What shops and services are still open during the government's strict measures?

The only shops and services that are open at this time are:

- Restaurants, cafes and work canteens – only for food delivery and takeaway
- Supermarkets selling food
- Health shops like pharmacies
- Petrol stations, garages and car rental businesses
- Bicycle shops
- Home and hardware shops
- Laundrettes and dry cleaners
- Pet shops
- Corner shops, newsagents and post offices
- Banks

What is social distancing?

Coronavirus is most likely to spread from person to person so by having less contact between you and other people we can slow down the spread of the virus. You should also continue practicing good hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water

for 20 seconds, using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser, avoid handshaking and covering your cough or sneeze with your elbow or in a tissue you then discard.

Do you need to know if I am self-isolating?

Yes, we want to make sure that you, your family and our colleagues are safe and reducing the spread of the virus. Please contact us as soon as you can to make us aware that you are self-isolating. We will keep this information only for as long as necessary to keep you and our colleagues safe.

I think I am/a family member/my neighbour is vulnerable, what do I do?

We ask that you try and prevent the transmission of the virus by following the advice above and share this advice with your family and friends. Please share your concerns with a medical specialist or your GP, they may be able to offer advice relating to your own personal circumstances. If you think you, a family member or a neighbour may have contracted coronavirus please do not visit your GP, visit the NHS 111 online website where you can find out if you need medical help and what to do next.

I'm self-isolating, how can I stay safe at home?

If you are self-isolating, reach out to neighbours, friends and family who can provide you supplies. You can also get food deliveries to your home through all the major supermarkets. Stay at least two metres away from other people in your home and sleep alone if possible. You must also wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water.

Can I visit your office?

Unfortunately, from Thursday 19 March 2020 our offices will be closed for yours and our colleagues' safety. If you have an emergency or need some advice, you can still contact us on the phone, our website or through our live chat.

I was supposed to be collecting the keys to my house, will this still happen?

Unfortunately, this will not take place while the government has placed strict measures on the country. We want to make sure that you, your family and our colleagues are as safe as possible and there is currently no safe approach to sign ups.

Will you be taking on any new sign ups?

For yours, your family's and our colleagues' safety we will not be advertising properties or signing up any new customers to properties at this time.

I was due a property visit, will this still happen?

For the safety of you, your family and our colleagues we are no longer carrying out property visits. If you have a non-emergency visit booked with us we will be contacting you to cancel this until further notice.

What are critical care services?

From Wednesday 25 March we will only be carrying out critical care services. This includes:

- Gas servicing (under review)
- Significant water leaks such as flooding of the property, ingress, burst pipes etc
- Electrical outages including full loss of power to part of or a whole building
- Gas leaks - If you smell gas contact National Grid Gas (Transco) immediately on 0800 111 999

For our most vulnerable customers, we may also be able to support with loss of hot water or loss of heating but these will be considered on a case by case basis, according to the risks.

I have a repair booked, will this still happen?

For the safety of you, your family and our colleagues we are now only carrying out critical care services. If you have a non-emergency repair booked with us we will be contacting you to cancel this until further notice.

I have an emergency, what do I do?

If you have an emergency please contact us over the phone or online where we can assess the situation and provide advice and guidance.

We will carry out critical care services in a way that is safe for you, your family and our colleagues. This will mean that colleagues will ask you a series of questions before we carry out any works, they will wear necessary PPE and may ask you to move to another room when work is being carried out.

I smell gas what do I do?

If you smell gas in your property you will need to contact National Grid Gas (Transco) immediately on 0800 111 999.

I'm worried about paying my rent, what do I do?

We appreciate customers may have concerns about working and finances right now. We're here to help and want you to feel secure in your home. We know you'll make every effort to maintain your rent payments but if you do get sick or can't work because of the coronavirus, we'll let you stay in your home and do everything we can to help you maintain your tenancy. We're here to provide you ongoing support including explaining your options and helping you access the right benefits.

What happens if I can't work?

If you cannot work due to the coronavirus (self isolating following government advice or infected) and are eligible for statutory sick pay, you will get it from day one.

How will I know if I qualify for statutory sick pay?

To qualify you will need to be classed as an employee, earn an average of at least £118 per week and tell your employer you're sick before their deadline.

Agency workers are also entitled to statutory sick pay.

You will not be eligible if you are getting Statutory Maternity Pay or have received the maximum amount of Statutory Sick Pay (28 weeks).

What do I do if I'm not eligible for statutory sick pay?

If you are not eligible for statutory sick pay but are infected with COVID 19 or are prevented from working because of COVID 19, you may be able to apply for Universal Credit or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

You can [apply for Universal Credit](#) online. If you need to make an appointment, call the number you are given when you submit your claim and explain your situation. In these circumstances, you can receive up to a month's advance upfront without attending a job centre.

The DWP has announced temporary measures for Universal Credit to support people during this time. This includes 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.

If you need to claim ESA because of coronavirus you will not have to produce a Fit Note. The usual seven day wait time will also not apply under these circumstances and you will receive this from day one.

What if I'm already claiming Universal Credit?

You must tell the DWP as soon as possible that you are staying at home on government advice or have been diagnosed with coronavirus. This is very important to make sure you are not sanctioned. To do this, use your [online journal](#) or call the Universal Credit [helpline](#) (0800 328 5644).

If you cannot attend health reassessments or job centre appointments because you are self-isolating or infected, special arrangements will be put in place and appointments rescheduled. Mandatory work search and work availability will also be removed to account for a period of sickness.

What if I'm self-employed?

If you are self-employed and infected by COVID 19, self-isolating or unable to work because of COVID 19, you are eligible to claim Universal Credit.

You can [apply for Universal Credit](#) online. If you need to make an appointment, call the number you are given when you submit your claim and explain your situation. In these circumstances, you can receive up to a month's advance upfront without attending a job centre.

From 6 April 2020, the DWP will be temporarily relaxing the Minimum Income Floor for all self-employed claimants affected by the economic impact of COVID 19. This means that self-employed claimants will be supported by basing their Universal Credit award on their actual earnings.

How will you protect my personal data during this period?

We will continue to make sure that your personal information is kept as securely as possible. Any details you give us about your health will only be used by us to ensure that we continue to give services in a manner which is safe for you, your family and our colleagues. We will only share that information with those organisations who provide public health support when absolutely necessary and lawful to do so. Please read our customer privacy notice, here [\[link\]](#) for more information. If you have a trusted relative or friend that you wish us to contact about matters affecting your tenancy if you become ill then please contact us so we can arrange for you to receive the forms.

I'm self-isolating but afraid of being at risk of domestic abuse, what do I do?

Whilst home is widely considered the safest place to be, this is far from reality for victims of domestic abuse. If you or someone you know is at risk, then know that you are not alone, get in touch with us or call 999 if there is immediate danger. There are also a range of support services available for people:

- **Women's Aid:** domestic abuse support for women
- **Mankind:** domestic abuse support for men
- **GALOP:** can help if you experience homophobia, transphobia or biphobia wherever it occurs
- **National Centre for Domestic Violence:** free, fast emergency injunction service to survivors of domestic violence
- **Victim Support:** online and phone support
- **Dash charity:** confidential advice and support
- **Paladin Stalking Service:** hotline and support for victims of stalking
- **Karma Nirvana:** help and support for victims of honour-based violence and forced marriages
- **Oii My Size:** healthy relationship advice and support for teenagers
- **Hollie Guard app:** an app to keep victims safe and monitor abuse
- **Polish Domestic Abuse helpline:** for Polish nationals living in the UK
- **Hampton Trust:** a charity that runs programmes for perpetrators of domestic abuse

How are you keeping people from getting affected in Independent Living schemes?

We have introduced some robust measures to make sure you, your family and our colleagues are safe. Unfortunately, we have had to close our communal lounges, stop group activities and cancel any guest room bookings. We have increased cleaning in the schemes and will continue to provide the meal service directly to customers' doors. There will also be remote contact with customers and responses to alarm calls will be through the call system.

How will you continue to support the vulnerable/elderly if you have significant staff absence?

We are doing everything we can to minimise the risk of coronavirus for our colleagues and our customers. If we do experience a high level of staff absence, we have business continuity plans in place that will see people leading our non-essential activities moved to help support our most important activities. We are also working with the local authority and partners in the community to make sure the vulnerable are supported.

I'm in a property with shared facilities, can I use communal/support laundry facilities?

If you have been unwell or are self-isolating then do not use the community laundry facilities. If you have been unwell please follow the following government guidance. If dirty laundry has been in contact with an ill person, you should wait a further 72 hours after the 14-day isolation period before washing your laundry in communal facilities. Items that are heavily soiled with bodily fluids, for example vomit or diarrhoea, should be disposed of.

What about visitors to my home, should I be asking them not to visit?

During the government's strict measures, friends and family should not leave their home or visit you unless they are providing essential care for you, this includes help with washing, dressing or preparing meals.

If you receive regular health or social care from friends, family or an organisation, speak to them about the extra precautions they are taking to keep you safe.

I have booked the guest room in my shared accommodation, should my guests still visit?

Our guest rooms are currently unavailable to make sure you are as safe as possible. We will be cancelling already booked appointments and will not be taking any further bookings until the government's strict measures are lifted. Friends and family should not be visiting you unless they are providing essential care for you.

What if I need to self-isolate for longer?

It is important that you are prepared for long periods of self-isolation. You may wish to contact your local pharmacy to see if they offer release prescription and delivery services in your area. You should also ask your local bank to set up standing orders or direct debits for core bills if you have not done so already, some banks also offer telephone banking. Most high street supermarkets offer online shopping and delivery services so book a slot as early as possible to make sure you receive food and necessary supplies. Some supermarkets also offer telephone shopping.

What if I need to attend a medical appointment?

Whether you are showing symptoms or not, it's a good idea to phone ahead to see what your medical professional advises. If you do have symptoms, make sure you tell them.

Is there anything else you think I should be aware of?

Whilst the majority of people are looking out for their family, friends and neighbours at this time, unfortunately there are some people who are taking advantage of the situation. If you receive a call, an email or a knock on your door from people claiming they are offering services or testing for coronavirus, please alert us immediately and follow the below guidance:

1. Do not give any personal information (name, address, bank details, contact details) to people without verifying their credentials. Always ask for ID and contact the company they work for directly to check.
2. Make sure your computer has up to date anti-virus software and a firewall installed
3. Many frauds start with phishing emails. Banks and other financial institutions will not send you an email asking you for information or to click on a link, so never provide this information
4. Never give out personal details or bank details over email or over the phone
5. Sign up to Verified by Visa or MasterCard Secure Code when you are given the option to when shopping online. This will involve registering a password with your card company and adds an additional layer of security to your transactions.
6. Regularly check bank statements for entries you don't recognise. If you don't recognise a transaction, contact your bank immediately.
7. Destroy or shred any receipts or post with your card details on.
8. If you think you have been a victim of fraud or want to check unusual activity, contact us immediately.