

Penderels Trust: Coronavirus COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions for Personal Assistants

We know people who work for an individual employer who receives a direct payment for their care and support are really worried about Coronavirus COVID-19. In this time of uncertainty, ensuring people who need care and support still receive it is a priority. There have been assurances from national government that local authorities and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) will do everything in their power to keep care going.

We have put together this information to help answer some of the most common questions we are receiving from personal assistants (PAs).

This is based on the information as of the date at the bottom of this page and we may update this information several times in the coming days and weeks. For up-to-date Government information for employees, please visit:

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

Clarity of Self-Isolation Periods

Some people are confused about how long they need to self-isolate if they are in a vulnerable group (such as being over 70 years old or having an underlying health condition or disability) or if they, or someone in their household, are showing symptoms. This is the Government advice:

- If you have symptoms, you should apply to get a coronavirus test. You can book online at: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>
- If you live alone and you have symptoms of coronavirus illness (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home for **10 days** from when your symptoms started. This was previously 7 days and is a change which came into force on 30th July 2020.
- If you live with others and you are the first in the household to have symptoms of coronavirus, then you must stay at home for 10 days, but all other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for **10 days** (this has been reduced from 14 days as of Monday 14th December 2020). The 10-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.
- For anyone else in the household who starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for 10 days from when the symptoms appeared, regardless of what day they are on in the original 10-day isolation period.

- The NHS 'Test and Trace' service is now live. This means that people with symptoms must apply for a test. If they test positive, they will be contacted by NHS contact tracers who will ask who else they were in contact with. Any of those contacts who are deemed at risk will be asked to self-isolate for 10 days even if they feel well.
- All travel corridors were suspended on Monday 18th January 2021. Anyone who has returned to the UK from abroad must have a negative test result within the previous 72 hours and must self-isolate for 10 days after they return. For more information, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors#stay-up-to-date>
- If you are unable to work as you need to care for a child who has been asked to stay at home by their school, you will not be eligible for SSP unless your child has been tested positive for Covid-19. If your child has to self-isolate because a classmate has tested positive, you will not be eligible.

The following are the most common questions we are receiving from people who work for an individual employer who receives a direct payment for their care and support.

Q: Can I still go to work now we are in a national lockdown?

Yes. The Government guidance says that if your job involves working in other people's homes then you can continue to go to work. The exception is if you are clinically extremely vulnerable (shielding), in which case you should not attend work. Your employer should seek guidance from their Penderels Trust ILA and insurance provider for further guidance on how to ensure they still receive care and what to do about paying you.

It is really important that everyone you come into contact with (your employer and anyone else who lives in their house) follows strict NHS guidelines on hygiene to reduce risk. Please ensure use appropriate PPE which is available for free via your employer's local authority (please see last page for more information on PPE).

Q: My employer doesn't want me come to work until I've had the Covid-19 vaccine. When will that be?

If you have not already been invited for your vaccination, you can book online as you are a frontline social care worker. Please visit the National Booking Service <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/> to book your vaccination. You should let your employer know you've booked your vaccination and you may need to tell your local authority too (local arrangements for this vary).

Q: I have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive with Covid-19, do I need to self-isolate?

If you have had close contact with someone who has tested positive, you should self-isolate for 10 days. 'Close contact' is described as:

- Spending 15 minutes or more within 2 metres of an infected person
- Very close personal interaction for a shorter period of time
- Someone who has lived in the same household during the period of potential risk transmission (e.g. if someone in your household has tested positive, you will need to self-isolate. If you are a live-in PA/carer, you would count as a member of your employer's household if someone in their house tests positive).

If you have had close contact with somebody who has tested positive for COVID-19 (or who has symptoms of COVID-19 and is waiting to be tested) but were wearing appropriate PPE during this close contact, it is unlikely you will need to isolate. These cases will be escalated to the local public health team to advise on, but unless there are very specific circumstances around the contact, they will usually advise that you can continue to work as normal.

If you had close contact with somebody who has tested positive for COVID-19 (or who has symptoms of COVID-19 and is waiting to be tested) but was either not wearing PPE at the time, or there was a PPE breach, then you will normally need to isolate for 10 days, in line with advice.

Q: I need to self-isolate, will I get paid Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)?

Yes, if you are eligible (earn over £120/week). You will be paid from day one rather than the fourth day of your illness if you are absent due to the following:

- You have coronavirus (COVID-19)
- You have coronavirus symptoms, for example a high temperature, a new continuous cough or a loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste
- Someone in your household has coronavirus symptoms
- You've been advised to stay at home by their doctor because of an underlying health condition
- You've been told to self-isolate by a doctor or NHS 111
- You've been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace because you've been in close contact with someone who tested positive.

You can get a self-isolation note by visiting <https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>

If you are self-isolating because you have returned from abroad and went to a country that is not on the 'exempt' list (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors#stay-up-to-date>), you will not be entitled to SSP. This

means if you are returning from a non-exempt country, you must self-isolate for 10 days. You should request to take annual leave or you may need to take unpaid leave.

Q: I have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. Am I eligible for the £500 support payment?

You can apply for the support payment if you cannot work from home and claim at least one of the following benefits: working tax credit, universal credit, income-related employment and support allowance, income-based jobseekers allowance, income support, pension credit or housing benefit. You will need to apply for this payment via their local authority.

If you do not receive one of the benefits listed above, you may qualify for a 'discretionary payment' if you will face financial hardship by self-isolating. For more information, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme>

Q: I am self-isolating. Do I need to provide my employer with a fit note from the doctor or NHS 111?

If you are self-isolating, you will not be able to go to your doctor and are being asked not to call NHS111 unless you really need to. You do not need to provide evidence for your employer to claim SSP for you but you can get an isolation note from NHS online by following the link here <https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>. If you are self-isolating and then become sick, you should let your employer know (by telephone not in person).

Q: I'm self-isolating but I don't earn enough to be eligible for SSP, what do I do?

If you are affected by Covid-19, you can apply for Universal Credit and can receive an advance without physically attending a job centre. Please visit <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/> for more information.

Q: My husband has tested positive for Coronavirus but I'm well and I need to work. Can I still work if my employer is happy for me to?

As of 28th September 2020, it was made unlawful for anyone to go to work if they have tested positive and need to self-isolate or if they are required to self-isolate because someone they live with or come into close contact with has tested positive. This is now an offence with employers facing a fine of £1,000 for the first offence, rising to £10,000 for repeat offenders if they allow (or force) you to come to work.

PAs, like all employees, are now under a legal obligation to self-isolate if they have tested positive or live with/been in close contact with someone who has tested

positive. You are legally obliged to tell your employer. Failure to do so is an offence and you may receive a fixed penalty notice of £50.

Q: I have heard that social care workers can have regular testing, does that include PAs?

Yes. PAs are now eligible for weekly PCR testing like care home staff. You need to apply for 4 x weekly tests to be sent to you or your employer. You should do the test swab at the same time each week. You need to register you have completed the test online and send the test in the envelope provided. To apply for tests, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-personal-assistants>. The Department of Health and Social Care is also running weekly information webinars on this which can be booked via this link:

https://event.webcasts.com/starthere.jsp?ei=1433378&tp_key=cc65e8ae2d

Q: My employer is self-isolating and has told me not to come to work. Will I still get paid?

Yes, you should still be paid.

It would be a good idea to talk through the options with your employer (over the phone not in person).

Are you able to do other tasks for them such as getting essential shopping, doing the gardening or walking the dog?

They can ask you take annual leave but you don't have to agree to this.

Q: I've got a cold but I don't think it's Covid-19 and want to keep working. My employer wants to send me home. Do I have to go home?

If you have any of the symptoms that may be Covid-19, you must go home in line with Government guidance. You should ask for a virus test. If you test positive, you must follow Government guidance on self-isolation. If you test negative, you can return to work provided you feel well enough.

Q: I am on a zero hours contract and take my employer's son, who has additional needs, to leisure activities which are now closed. Will I still get paid or will I be 'furloughed'?

There are a number of options here. Your employer may be able to pay you a retainer based on your average earnings over the previous 12 months out of their direct payment. They should check with their local authority or employer's liability insurance provider.

Q: My employer has said they want a family member to care for them instead of me as they feel it is less risky. Will I still get paid?

Yes. Your employer should continue to pay you your normal wages unless you come to an agreement that you will accept less as you don't have to go to work.

Q: Do I need to wear Protective Personal Equipment (PPE)?

The type of PPE that is recommended for a home care worker, including PAs, has recently been updated by the government. This can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-domiciliary-care>

Advice on how to put on (donning) and taking off (doffing) PPE can also be found within this link or by looking at the one-page guides on our website.

Your employer should refer to your local authority/CCG about obtaining supplies of PPE in your area as they are co-ordinating distribution. It is their responsibility to make sure you have adequate supplies of PPE.

PPE supplies for PAs will now be provided free even if your employer paid for PPE out of their direct payment before Covid-19. This is a change in government guidance as per their update on 18th November 2020.

Please note that Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Shared Parental Pay and Statutory Adoption Pay are not affected.

For general employment advice about coronavirus, please visit www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus

Please visit our website www.penderelstrust.org.uk and go to our Coronavirus section on the home page for more useful information.