

# Coronavirus FAQs

## 19 March 2020

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In view of the outbreak of coronavirus across the world and in the UK, it is important for employers to carefully consider what they can do to protect their business and their employees from virus epidemics, especially if the threat escalates.

Please note that the advice on coronavirus is being reviewed daily. Our team continue to closely monitor government updates and when legal changes happen, we will update our [online FAQ page](#) to reflect the current situation.

On 17th March 2020, the Government made further announcements on measures and support they pledge to give to businesses and the public at large in the lead up to new emergency legislation coming in to force to deal with the impact of Coronavirus. Government guidance is available [HERE](#), which also sets out what is to be considered under the new bill to be tabled in Parliament on 19th March 2020.

#### **Q: What steps should I take now in response to the COVID-19?**

It is strongly advised that employers introduce new safety rules at work consistent with any guidance issued by Public Health England (PHE) that affects the workplace or employment relationships. In particular putting in place a flu pandemic or infectious diseases contingency plan that addresses business continuity in the event that the situation worsens and develops. Even if this situation does not currently affect your business, it is good practice to have contingency plans regardless.

Where you have an attendance management policy consider whether to specify that a period of absence caused by COVID-19 infection or self-isolation in accordance with PHE guidance will not be taken into account in deciding whether the thresholds at which management action is taken have been reached. This will be especially relevant in the case of a disabled employee who has a compromised immune system or is at higher risk of contracting severe COVID-19.

Provide tissues at each workstation and place hand sanitizers at several locations around the workplace, such as by printers or in communal areas like kitchens, canteens and toilets.

Ultimately as an employer you need to be mindful of your statutory and common law obligations to protect the health and safety of your workforce, as well as the obligation to maintain mutual trust and confidence.

This is because an employee may resign and claim constructive dismissal where they consider their employer has not taken reasonable steps to ensure their safety, for example, by failing to introduce or monitor appropriate hygiene standards in the workplace or failing to prevent a person who should be self-isolating to attend work.

Employers should also note the recent government announcement which encourages employees to work from home, if at all possible.

### **Q: What do I pay someone who is off sick with coronavirus?**

If an employee is off sick with coronavirus, you will need to pay them what they would usually get paid if they were off sick with anything else. This may be Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or company sick pay, if they are entitled to it. There are no waiting days if an employee is being paid SSP in relation to coronavirus.

### **Q: Do I need to pay someone if they are self-isolating and they have chosen to do this, without being ill themselves?**

This position has developed since the initial outbreak of the virus. The government has now stated that an employee or worker should receive any SSP due to them if they need to self-isolate because they:

- have coronavirus
- have a high temperature or new continuous cough
- reside with other people who have symptoms of the virus (usually 14 days of self-isolation from the day the first person in their home got symptoms).

Due to a recent government announcement, employers are now encouraged to allow employees to work from home on full pay, if it is operationally feasible.

If home-working is not feasible and the above bullets do not apply to an employee, such as because they are choosing to self-isolate out of caution, you should nevertheless investigate with them to get a better understanding as to why they believe that they should self-isolate. Certainly, in order to avoid any possible risk of the virus spreading to other staff in the workplace, you may be happy to accept the employee's approach to self-isolate.

Regarding the three areas referenced above - whilst the minimum pay is SSP, there is nothing wrong with an employer paying more than SSP, certainly if it is the case where contractual sick pay applies. Or it may be the case that the employee says, although they need to self-isolate, they feel well enough to do some work from home.

If you are satisfied that the employee is well enough to work from home during a period of self-isolation then they should be paid their normal pay rather than SSP, however this position should be kept under constant review, as the employee's health may deteriorate. You also need to ensure that you do not put yourself in a situation where an employee argues that they felt that they had no choice but to work during a period of self-isolation.

This situation will be different though if after further investigation you do not accept the employee's reason for self-isolating, especially where they confirm that they have no symptoms and have not been in contact with anyone who has symptoms of the virus (or who has confirmed virus) or that they have not returned from an 'at risk' country.

In such instances, an employee should attend work as normal and if they choose not to do so, this could be deemed as unauthorised absence or a conduct issue depending on the

contents of your disciplinary policy. However, as above - employers must have regard for the recent government announcement whereby employees are now encouraged to work from home, if it is possible to do so.

**Q: Do I need to pay someone if they are being asked to isolate themselves by a medical professional?**

As stated above, this situation has developed, and the government is now stating that an employee or worker should receive any SSP due to them if they need to self-isolate because they:

- have coronavirus
- have a high temperature or new continuous cough
- reside with other people who have symptoms of the virus (usually 14 days of self-isolation from the day the first person in their home had symptoms).

From the 13th March 2020, new regulations have come in to force amending who is to be covered when it comes to 'persons deemed 'incapable for work' for the purposes of sick pay entitlement.

Under the Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) Regulations 2020, for the purposes of sick pay entitlement, someone who is isolating themselves from other people in order to prevent infection or contamination with coronavirus disease will also be deemed to be 'incapable of work' and therefore entitled to SSP or contractual sick pay depending on the policy used by employers.

The key thing is to ensure that there is open and constant communication with your employees and workers around self-isolation so that you can have a clear understanding of their health status and condition. The normal rules on 7 day self-certification still apply and anything beyond this point should be evidenced where possible by a fit note. Please bear in mind though, that there may be a delay around receiving this (the employee will not be able to attend their GP in person if they are self-isolating).

Although an employee may deem it necessary to self-isolate, they may argue that they are well enough to work from home. If you are satisfied that they are well enough to work from home and they do so, they should be paid their normal pay. Please note though that this situation should be closely monitored, especially where the employee's health deteriorates.

An employee has told us that someone in their house is showing symptoms of COVID-19, do we have to allow that person to self-isolate even though they themselves have shown no symptoms?

The advice from the government at this time is that if an employee lives with a person who has symptoms of the virus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

The government advice states that is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already therefore staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

**Q: If someone is self-isolating because someone in their house is showing symptoms of COVID-19, are they entitled to sick pay?**

Any employee who self isolates either because they are showing symptoms, or because they are living in the same house as someone who is showing symptoms, will be entitled to their normal sickness payment under their contract of employment.

Employees absent due to COVID-19 (i.e they have the virus or are self-isolating because they have symptoms of the virus or they are self-isolating for 14 days because someone in their household has symptoms of the virus) are now entitled to sick pay from day 1 of their absence.

**Q: Do the waiting days for SSP in cases of coronavirus apply?**

No. It was announced on the 4th March 2020 that SSP will apply from day one of sickness for cases involving coronavirus. Therefore, the usual three SSP waiting days will not apply.

What do I pay someone if I send them home because I feel it is too risky for them to be in work, for example, because they are a returning traveller from a high risk area?

In these circumstances, you would need to pay the employee full pay as this would be deemed a medical suspension. If the employee was then to become sick with the virus, their sickness entitlement would then apply whether this is SSP or contractual sick pay. So the employee would move from full pay to SSP or contractual sick pay.

In relation to absences associated with the coronavirus, the three day waiting period for SSP has been waived for example, where the employee does not have confirmed coronavirus but has a fever and a new, consistent cough or they are self-isolating for 14 days due to someone they reside with having symptoms of the virus.

**Q: What if I need to cut my employees' hours down quickly, to take into account loss of business because of the virus?**

You could take advantage of any lay-off or short-time working clauses in your contracts. However, if this is not possible, please call our radarstation team on 0800 955 6111, during our opening hours of 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, and our team will be able to advise you around the specific facts pertaining to your individual situation.

**Q: Can we implement lay-offs or short-term working if we do not have any clause in the employee's contract permitting this?**

In the event that you do not have a clause in your employees' contracts of employment for short-time working or lay-off, in order to implement those measures you would first need to seek the employees express written agreement to put that clause into their contract of employment.

To do so would mean taking the employees through a variation of terms and conditions process and to consulting with them one to one to explain why you wish to implement this into their contracts and the benefits to them, which could include the potential avoidance of a future redundancy situation.

In order to implement this change to their contracts the employees do need expressly consent to this willingly, in writing.

After the employee has consented to this change you can issue them a contract addendum letter outlining what the wording shall be for this new lay-off and/or short-term working clauses which they have agreed to, and from what date those clauses become effective from. Once the employee has consented, it is possible for the clause to be implemented there and then if you wish.

In the event any employees refuse to accept the change you have proposed, then those employees shall stay on their current contractual terms and conditions. Those employees shall not be able to be laid off or put on short-time working, but, as a result, if a situation does arise where the business is unable to fulfil their minimum weekly contracted hours then this may result in a redundancy situation for those employees.

In the event your organisation may be considering making redundancies, we kindly request that you please call our rradarstation team on 0800 955 6111, during our opening hours of 8 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday, and our team will be able to advise you around the specific facts pertaining to your individual situation.

#### **Q: What if an employee is refusing to come in to work out of fear of contracting the virus?**

All employees who are well will be expected to attend work unless they:

- have coronavirus
- have a high temperature or new continuous cough
- reside with other people who have symptoms of the virus (usually 14 days of self-isolation from the day the first person in their home had symptoms).

Employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their staff and so, in light of the most recent government announcement, they should consider allowing employees to work from home, wherever this is possible.

If you are satisfied after further discussion with the employee, that none of the above bullets apply (and home-working is not possible) and an employee is refusing to come in to work, you should hold a discussion with the member of staff in order to understand their concerns.

If those concerns appear genuine, consideration should be given as to how the staff member can be best supported such as by considering a period of annual leave or unpaid leave. You should note that:

There is no obligation on the employer to offer employees a period of unpaid leave in these circumstances.

Employers can allow employees to submit annual leave, however this can be refused if not operationally feasible.

The disciplinary procedure can be followed if any staff member refuses to attend work, without good reason.

**Q: What should I do if my staff are unable to come to work because their childcare has been disrupted or because they need to care for unwell dependants?**

Section 57A Employment Rights Act 1996 gives employees the right to take time off work to help someone who depends on them, known as a 'dependant', where there has been an unexpected disruption to the arrangements to care for the dependant, an incident at school, or where the dependant is ill, this would therefore apply to situations to do with coronavirus.

For example, if they have children they need to look after or arrange childcare for because their school has closed due to a coronavirus outbreak or to help their child or another dependant if they are sick, or need to go into isolation or hospital because of the coronavirus.

If an employee wants to use this right they must inform their employer as soon as possible of the reasons for their absence and the length of time they anticipate they will be off for. Usually though such leave entitlement is only expected for short periods of time. There is no right to be paid for such time off but the contract of employment or employee handbook may state otherwise, for example the employer may decide at their own discretion to pay in such circumstances.

**Q: An employee has told us someone in their house is a vulnerable person. No-one in their household is showing symptoms of COVID-19, but the employee has asked to work from home as a precaution. Do we have to allow this?**

If your business is equipped to enable employees to work from home, in light of the recent government announcement - you may wish to consider this as an adjustment providing that as a business this can be accommodated.

In the event your business cannot accommodate this, you are under no obligation to permit the employee to work from home however you may wish to instead look at any ways you can support the employee to limit any potential contraction of COVID-19 in the workplace.

In the event the employee or anyone in their household does start to show symptoms of COVID-19, then the employee and their whole household will need to go into self-isolation as per government guidelines and at that time they would be deemed to be absent from work and their normal sick pay rules may apply.

**Q: What should I do if my staff member is refusing to go on a business trip?**

Whilst you may be reluctant as an employer to cancel important business engagements, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has now advised British people against all non-essential travel worldwide, with immediate effect. Employers are also encouraged by the government to allow employees to work from home, if at all possible.

Employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all staff and so cannot insist an employee attends a business trip abroad. It is important to note that there have also been a number of international border closures and other restrictions imposed.

Employers should consider that it is not unreasonable to consider and agree to alternatives such as postponing the trip, conducting the engagement via phone, Skype or video link or relocating to a different meeting venue.

**Q: Will I need to close my workplace if a member of staff has or is suspected of having coronavirus?**

Having read the PHE guidance, the workplace will not necessarily have to close, it will be for an employer to contact their local PHE Health Protection Team to:

- discuss the case
- identify people who have been in contact with the affected person
- carry out a risk assessment
- advise on any actions or precautions to take

A risk assessment of each setting will be undertaken by the Health Protection Team with the lead responsible person. Advice on the management of staff and members of the public will be based on this assessment.

The Health Protection Team will also be in contact with the case directly to advise on isolation and identifying other contacts and will be in touch with any contacts of the case to provide them with appropriate advice. Advice on cleaning of communal areas such as offices or toilets will also be given by the Health Protection Team.

**Q: What happens if our business is facing an insolvency or redundancy situation because of COVID-19?**

In the event that you believe your organisation may be approaching a redundancy or insolvency situation due to the impact of COVID-19 on your organisation, we kindly request



that you please call our rradarstation team on 0800 955 6111, during our opening hours of 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, and our team will be able to advise you around the specific facts pertaining to your individual situation.

**Q: I have an employee that is self-isolating because one of their children has symptoms of COVID-19. What should happen if anyone else in their household then starts with symptoms too after the 14 day isolation period has begun?**

If an employee lives with someone who has symptoms, they will need to stay at home for 14 calendar days from the first day that person's symptoms started. This is because it can take 14 calendar days for symptoms to appear. If more than one person at home has symptoms, the employee will need to stay at home for 14 calendar days from the day that the first person in the home started having symptoms.

If the employee themselves then get symptoms, they must stay at home for seven calendar days from when their own symptoms started, even if it means they are at home for longer than 14 days. If the employee does not get any symptoms, despite other people in their home having symptoms, they can stop self-isolating at home after 14 calendar days.

**What leave are employees entitled to who have to take time off with their children now schools are shut, despite the children and the employee having no COVID-19 symptoms?**

The employee should be offered the following options, where eligible and where business needs can permit this:

### **Working from home**

Where businesses can allow this and it is appropriate to ask the employee to do so. You should bear in mind that, although the facilities may be available for the employee to work from home, the employee may need to care for younger children and so home working may not be a possibility.

### **Emergency dependant leave**

This is usually unpaid, unless your company policy states otherwise.

### **Unpaid parental leave**

### **Annual leave**

If, during their time off with the children, anyone in the employee's home develops symptoms of COVID-19 they will need to go into isolation, as per government guidelines. The employee will then be deemed off sick and so the same rules around SSP or company sick pay, where applicable, will apply as normal.

**What are the rules for unpaid parental leave and which parent has to be off with the children?**

Any person with parental or legal guardianship responsibility for a child under 18 years old is eligible for parental leave. This could include both parents or guardians if they have joint custody of the child or children.

Parental leave is unpaid, and the employee is entitled to 18 weeks' leave at four weeks per year, per child and adopted child, up to that child's 18th birthday. It is important to note that the leave must be taken as whole weeks, rather than individual days unless the child is disabled.

**I understand that the Government will be reimbursing companies paying SSP where the number of staff are below 250. We have more than 250 staff - does this mean that we have to pay this cost?**

There has been no additional guidance on this for now from the government. The current guidelines state that, for businesses under 250, the government will pay SSP for first 14 days for any COVID-19 related absences. For those with over 250 staff, currently we can only assume because we have had no other confirmation from the government that the business would still be responsible to pay the SSP for their employees.

**What happens if an employee does not qualify for SSP due to their earnings?**

If the employee does not qualify for SSP due to their earnings, they cannot have SSP as per normal rules. However, if their contract allows them to have company contractual sick pay that should still be paid. The employee should be encouraged to consult with the benefits agency to see if they have any entitlements.

## **Coronavirus FAQs for the Self Employed as of 18 March 2020**

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**Q: As a self-employed agent or self-employed consultant, can I claim Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or any other sick pay if I am unable to carry out work or fulfil a contract due to being infected with Coronavirus**

Ordinarily, self-employed agents and/or consultants are not entitled to receive SSP and this is in fact one of many factors that sets them apart from 'employees' and some workers who are entitled to be paid this by their employer. However, following the budget announcement on 11th March 2020, one of the measures to mitigate the coronavirus impact on businesses

included that those who are self-employed will be able to claim contributory Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

Such an allowance will be available from day one, although it is not known at this stage the exact process to be followed in trying to claim the allowance. However the following link may well assist you until the government provide further information on process - <https://www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance/how-to-claim>

**Q: Am I entitled to any SSP or ESA if I have to self-isolate or am told by the company / organisation that I am doing work for, not to come in due to coronavirus fears?**

As at 13th March 2020, the government has stated that an employee or worker should receive any SSP due to them if they need to self-isolate because they have:

- coronavirus (usually 14 days of self-isolation)
- a high temperature or new continuous cough (usually 7 days of self-isolation)
- been told to self-isolate by a doctor or NHS 111

Unfortunately, at this stage, it is not clear whether the above position also applies to those who are purely 'self-employed' and also whether it includes the payments of ESA.

If you have been asked by the company/organisation you are doing work for to refrain from coming in, the starting point will be to look at the terms of the service contract/agreement that you have with them. In particular, are there clauses within it that set out the position on what will or will not be paid in circumstances where you fall ill or there is a pandemic or epidemic?

Even if you have to self-isolate, it may be that you do not in fact have any symptoms yourself, in which case you may still be perfectly capable of continuing your work from home. If this is the case, you should make it clear to the company/organisation and also make clear your expectation that they will continue to pay you your usual rate/invoices.

**Q: I am self-employed and engaged in a lot of work that requires travel to a lot of the high-risk areas where coronavirus has been detected. If I refuse to travel to such areas this will mean that I cannot complete the work, I have contracted to do and will not get paid. Would I be able to claim this non-payment from either the company/organisation I am contracted to do the work for, the government or indemnity insurers?**

The starting point will be to firstly look through the terms of your service contract/agreement as to whether it outlines what will or will not be paid by the company/organisation in such circumstances. Given that the government has advised against all but essential travel to some countries, cities and regions, your refusal should not be deemed unreasonable.

Also, it is possible that some countries, cities and regions will close down certain businesses and also place restrictions on leaving and entering in which case you may have no choice but to place your work on hold.

In terms of the government, depending on the nature of your self-employed status, you may benefit from another measure that was announced as part of the budget on 13th March 2020, the Business interruption loan scheme. This is a temporary scheme for banks to offer loans of up to £1.2m to support small and medium-sized businesses and will only apply during the period of the coronavirus outbreak. It is however unclear at this stage how businesses can go about applying for the scheme.

The government is set to bring in emergency legislation/a bill that will hopefully help to clarify and give more certainty on what further support will be provided. In the meantime the following link may assist - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

From an insurance perspective, the UK government has now classified the coronavirus as a "notifiable disease" in England and Wales, which is a requirement within insurance policies to attract cover. Scotland and Northern Ireland adopted the classification in February. However, it is worth noting that some policies may contain specific exclusions for epidemics and pandemics, with others having strict limits on the possible covers that could respond.

If you are considering making an insurance claim, you should also be aware that the terms of the policy will compel you to mitigate your losses where reasonably practicable and to act as a "prudent" Insured. Ultimately the best thing to do is to check the specific wording of your insurance policy and seek guidance from your insurance broker and/or insurer.

If there is a downturn in work or the company/organisation I carry out work for has to close down completely because of the coronavirus outbreak, where would I stand regarding being paid for the work I still have to complete?

This will again be very much dependent on what terms have been agreed in the service contract/agreement you have with the company/organisation. You certainly should at the very least be paid for the work you have carried out and completed up to that particular point, provided of course that you have supplied the necessary invoices.

Anything beyond this, i.e. the outstanding work that is yet to be completed may well come down to negotiation or that it is agreed by both parties that in the circumstances work is postponed or placed on hold until there is more certainty as to when the work will pick up again.

**Q: I am a self-employed agent, I have no symptoms, have not travelled anywhere that is high risk and have not come in to contact with anyone who has either travelled to a high-risk place or got the symptoms. Nevertheless, I do not want to take the risk and have decided to cancel all work projects until the outbreak dies down. Given that this is a situation outside of my control can I still get paid for the work I would have carried out if not for the outbreak?**

Unless the company/organisation you are carrying out the work for is on complete lockdown, it is highly likely that they will still expect you to complete the work they are paying you for, unless of course you contract the virus or start displaying virus symptoms.

You also have to consider the fact that, if you simply refuse to go in or turn up, the company/organisation may argue that it is a breach of contract and may look to sue you for any losses that they incur as a result of you not carrying out the work you are contracted to do.

It is understandable and natural that you may be feeling anxious and fearful at this time, however we would advise that you in the first instance share any concerns that you have with the organisation/company as it may be, following such discussion, you are reassured that actually the risks are minimal given any measures they may be putting in to place and be able to go in to work after all.

In addition, it may not be necessary to have a complete stop on work as depending on the nature of the work, you may have the facility to complete it from home, meaning you still get paid and the organisation/company get the work they need completed.

**Q: What happens if I cannot perform my work/services due to school closures affecting my children, could I still ask for payment?**

Whilst companies/organisations should be as flexible as possible at this time , you need to be prepared for the fact that any one day you are not carrying out the work required, is any on day where the company/organisation say they will not make any payment to you.

Even with being an 'employee' this would be the case, as although an 'employee' is entitled to take time off for dependents, i.e. where there has been an unexpected disruption to the arrangements to care for the dependant, an incident at school, or where the dependant is ill, such time is unpaid. Therefore, there is no reason why it would be different with 'non-employees' unless of course there is anything in your service contract/agreement to the contrary.

## Coronavirus FAQs and Data Protection

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The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) recognises the unprecedented challenges that everyone is facing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, especially with organisations needing to share information quickly or adapting the way they work.

The ICO have prepared some answers to the questions some common queries in relation to data protection during this time.

**Q: During the pandemic, we are worried that our data protection practices might not meet our usual standard or our response to information rights requests will be longer. Will the ICO take regulatory action against us?**

No. The ICO understand that resources, whether they are finances or people, might be diverted away from usual compliance or information governance work. The ICO will not penalise organisations that they know need to prioritise other areas or adapt their usual approach during this extraordinary period.

The ICO cannot extend statutory timescales, but the ICO will tell people through the ICO's own communications channels that they may experience understandable delays when making information rights requests during the pandemic.

**Q: As a healthcare organisation, can we contact individuals in relation to COVID-19 without having prior consent?**

Data protection and electronic communication laws do not stop Government, the NHS or any other health professionals from sending public health messages to people, either by phone, text or email as these messages are not direct marketing. Nor does it stop you using the latest technology to facilitate safe and speedy consultations and diagnoses.

Public bodies may require additional collection and sharing of personal data to protect against serious threats to public health.

More of our staff will be homeworking during the pandemic. What kind of security measures should my organisation have in place for homeworking during this period?

Data protection is not a barrier to increased and different types of homeworking. During the pandemic, staff may work from home more frequently than usual and they can use their own device or communications equipment.

Data protection law does not prevent that, but you will need to consider the same kinds of security measures for homeworking that you would use in normal circumstances.

**Q: Can I tell my staff that a colleague may have potentially contracted COVID-19?**

Yes. You should keep staff informed about cases in your organisation. Remember, you probably do not need to name individuals and you should not provide more information than necessary. You have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of your employees, as well as a duty of care. Data protection does not prevent you doing this.

**Q: Can I collect health data in relation to COVID-19 about employees or from visitors to my organisation? What about health information ahead of a conference, or an event?**

You have an obligation to protect your employees' health, but that does not necessarily mean you need to gather lots of information about them. It is reasonable to ask people to tell you if they have visited a particular country or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

You could ask visitors to consider government advice before they decide to come. Further, you could advise staff to call 111 if they are experiencing symptoms or have visited particular countries. This approach should help you to minimise the information you need to collect.

If that is not enough and you still need to collect specific health data, do not collect more than you need and ensure that any information collected is treated with the appropriate safeguards.

**Q: Can I share employees' health information to authorities for public health purposes?**

Yes. It is unlikely your organisation will have to share information with authorities about specific individuals, but if it is necessary then data protection law will not stop you from doing so.

More information from the ICO is available [HERE](#).

# Reducing the Financial Risks of Disruption from Coronavirus

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The following are some steps a business owner can take to help mitigate the financial difficulties a business may face over the coming weeks and months.

## Call HMRC

If the business is concerned about the implications of the coronavirus, HMRC has a set up a phone helpline to support businesses and self-employed people concerned about not being able to pay their tax due.

HMRC's helpline is **0800 0159 559**. Opening hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, and Saturday 8am to 4pm. The helpline will not be available on bank holidays.

For those businesses who are unable to pay due to coronavirus, HMRC will discuss their specific circumstances to explore:

- agreeing an instalment arrangement
- suspending debt collection proceedings
- cancelling penalties and interest where the business has administrative difficulties contacting or paying HMRC immediately

## Review using the Business Interruption Loan Scheme

A new temporary Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, delivered by the British Business Bank, will launch in a matter of weeks to support businesses to access bank lending and overdrafts.

The government will provide lenders with a guarantee of 80% on each loan (subject to a per-lender cap on claims) to give lenders further confidence in continuing to provide finance to small medium sized enterprises. The government will not charge businesses or banks for this guarantee, and the Scheme will support loans of up to £1.2 million in value.

This new guarantee will initially support up to £1 billion of lending on top of current support offered through the British Business Bank.

## Apply for a Coronavirus Grant when it becomes available

There will be a £3,000 cash grant made available to 700,000 of the smallest businesses, delivered by Local Authorities, and worth a total of £2 billion. The coronavirus grant only



applies to small business in England and it is not yet clear how businesses will access these grants.

### **Reclaim statutory sick pay costs**

Statutory Sick Pay costs can be reclaimed small and medium sized enterprises, which applies to employers with fewer than 250 employees. They will be able to reclaim statutory sick pay for employees unable to work because of the coronavirus for up to 14 days which is just under £200 per employee.

However, the government has mentioned that businesses may have to wait months for reimbursement because it has yet to set up a repayment mechanism.

### **Business rate reduction**

The government will not charge business rates, a property tax, on companies in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors in 2020-21. This includes hotels, restaurants and coffee shops. There is also a £5,000 business rates discount for pubs with a rateable value below £100,000 in England.

These measures mean that around 900,000 properties, or 45 per cent of all business premises in England, will not pay rates in 2020-21. Local authorities, which collect these rates, will be given £2.2 billion by the government to make up for the shortfall.

### **Check insurance cover**

Businesses should check with their insurance provider if they are covered for business interruption. These insurance policies are usually dependent on damage to property, which will exclude pandemics, although some businesses may have purchased a specific add on relating to notifiable diseases. Some businesses may have purchased supply chain or denial of access cover which they may also be able to claim on.

### **Speak to banks**

Several major banks have announced support measures for customers affected by coronavirus, including mortgage payment holidays, increased credit limits and penalty-free access to fixed savings. Barclays, Lloyds and NatWest are among some of the major banks that have confirmed that support will be available to customers affected by Covid-19.

Temporary credit limit increases, payment holidays on credit cards, loans and mortgages and fees waived on missed payments are some of the support measures being rolled out.

However, what exactly is available will depend on the business owner's personal circumstances and all customers' situations will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. This may ease the burden of financial pressures on individuals.

#### Keeping up to date:

With the rapidly changing nature of the COVID-19 outbreak, information and advice from Government can change quickly. For all the latest Government information on COVID-19 and the measures the Government, and Devolved Governments, are taking, please visit the [UK Government website](#), the [Scottish Government website](#), the [Welsh Government website](#) or the [Northern Irish Government website](#).