

27 March 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: COVID-19**

We are writing to you to provide you with some information that will assist you to prepare for dealing with COVID-19 as a recipient of Direct Payments. Please note the information included in this letter is correct as of the above date. Please refer to the NHS and government websites referenced in this letter for latest updates.

First of all please refer to Public Health Wales' website at <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/> for details of how you can protect yourself against the corona virus. Please find attached Guidance for Worker Visits COVID-19, which we hope you will find informative. We have also attached a Key Worker Letter Template for you to complete and give to your Personal Assistant(s). We would also recommend you keep abreast of the news from the BBC during the coming weeks to hear the latest government advice.

Please note Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is only required if an individual receiving care is symptomatic, otherwise no PPE is required above and beyond normal good hygiene practice. If care workers are required to provide care to within one metre of a symptomatic person they are caring for and are unable to source their own supply of PPE, please send a request to [pccsscommissioning@powys.gov.uk](mailto:pccsscommissioning@powys.gov.uk). Please mark your request for the attention of Chris Evans/Sally Heaton with a phone number for them to call you back on. Requests received and processed before 3pm will be ordered and delivered by NRS Healthcare on the following day.

You should also plan what you will do if your Personal Assistant calls in sick or has to self-isolate. Please think about who you could ask to help you such as family and friends. We have produced the following scenarios that may help you in the weeks and months ahead:

1. You are self-isolating and do not want your Personal Assistant(s) to come into your home:
  - You should give consideration as to whether your Personal Assistant(s) could still carry out some tasks for you, such as shopping for food, collecting a prescription, doing laundry, delivering a hot meal or staying in regular contact via the phone.
  - Your Personal Assistant(s) should still be paid their agreed hours. When submitting time sheets please make it clear which hours have not been worked but still need to be paid. Please do this by writing **COVID-19** next to each appropriate entry.
  - If these arrangements need to be extended after two weeks of self-isolation, you will need to discuss with a social worker.
  - You will still need to pay your personal contribution during the two weeks of self-isolation.

- If you intend to self-isolate for twelve weeks and your Personal Assistant(s) is not needed because you have robust alternative arrangements in place your Direct Payment will be suspended. At this difficult time, it is highly likely that Personal Assistant(s) will be needed to support other vulnerable people in the community, so we would encourage them to
  - contact PeoplePlus or register on the PeoplePlus Personal Assistant portal link, which is <https://peopleplus.mylifeportal.co.uk/landing-pages/become-a-personal-assistant/>
  - Further advice can be found on the People Plus website <https://peopleplus.co.uk/communities/direct-payment-support-services/>
2. Your Personal Assistant(s) has symptoms of COVID-19 (a high temperature or a new, continuous cough) and has been advised to self-isolate:
- Self-isolating employees are legally defined as being unfit to attend work. It's important that they stay at home and self-isolate if they are displaying symptoms. For further advice regarding staying at home please visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>
  - If your Personal Assistant(s) tells you they have symptoms of COVID-19, they should stay at home. If they earn above the Lower Employment Limit (LEL) statutory sick pay would apply from day one.
  - If they don't qualify, they can check [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) to see if they can get financial support in the form of Universal Credit or Employment Support Allowance.
  - The [statutory sick pay \(SSP\)](#) regulations 2020 (coronavirus amendment) came into force Friday 13 March. SSP will now be payable to those self-isolating merely under Government guidance so there's no need for formal written notice to be given by a medical officer. If they are eligible (earn over £118/week) they will be paid from day one rather than the fourth day of their illness. This will be applied retrospectively from 13th March 2020.
  - If you feel it's safer for your Personal Assistant(s) to self-isolate, even though they haven't displayed any symptoms, you'll need to pay them if they're on contracted hours, as discussed in Scenario 1 above.
3. Your Personal Assistant(s) has symptoms of COVID-19 (a high temperature or a new, continuous cough) has self-isolated and you need to employ a temporary replacement Personal Assistant(s):
- Temporary replacement Personal Assistant(s) should be paid out of any surplus funds within your account, if possible.
  - In exceptional circumstances an Emergency Direct Payment can be requested to cover the additional payments associated with employing a temporary Personal Assistant(s), by contacting your Social Worker or ASSIST on 0345 602 7050

4. My Personal Assistant is showing symptoms but does not want to self-isolate and says they are fit for work. What do I do?

They should be sent home. If they are sick or self-isolating because they are showing symptoms, you should claim SSP if they are eligible. If not, they will need to apply for Universal Credit (as per Scenario 2). You need to put your contingency plan into action.

5. I am in the 'high risk' category and have received a letter from the NHS saying I need to stay at home for 12 weeks. Can my Personal Assistant still work for me?

Yes, your Personal Assistant can still work for you as your care and support needs will continue. It is really important that everyone you come into contact with (your Personal Assistant(s) and anyone else who lives in your house) follows strict NHS guidelines on hygiene to reduce risk.

6. My Personal Assistant is self-isolating and I need to pay SSP from my Direct Payment, will I get it refunded?

Yes. SSP will be paid out through payroll and claimed back via HMRC. We as your payroll provider will deal with this for you. This refund will be for up to two weeks per employee.

For purposes of payroll time sheets:

- if you have requested your personal assistant not to come in – please mark **COVID-19** next to the appropriate entry
- if your Personal Assistant(s) has symptoms, lives with someone who has symptoms or has been advised by a GP or NHS 111 to self-isolate they should do so from day one– please mark **SICK** next to the appropriate entry.

For additional Employment Advice and Support you may wish to contact your insurance provider or ACAS:

- Mark Bates Ltd – Helpline  
01476 591104 <https://markbatesltd.com>
- Fish Insurance  
0333 331 3770 <https://www.fishinsurance.co.uk>
- ACAS  
0300 123 1100 <https://www.acas.org.uk/>

If your care arrangements have broken down, you should in the first instance call your social worker directly. If you don't have a named social worker, please call the County Council as follows:

**ASSIST:** 0345 602 7050 (Adults)

**Powys People Direct:** 01597 827666 (Children and Young People)

We would be grateful if you would share this letter and information with your Personal Assistant(s).

Finally, if you have an email address would you please let us know what this is, as this will be the most efficient way to get information to you and helps with contingency planning if post is no longer an option over the weeks and months ahead.

Yours faithfully

**Paul Reynolds | Head of Social Care**

NB In the interests of sharing emergency advice and information, this letter has not been translated into Welsh, please contact us if you require a Welsh version.