



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Briefing and Q&A for Local Authorities on changes to Self-Isolation

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What is changing?

1. Why does self-isolation matter?

Ensuring infected individuals and their close contacts isolate is one of our most powerful tools for controlling transmission.

We know that someone with the virus can remain infectious to other people for up to 10 days after developing symptoms. It can take up to 14 days for individuals to develop coronavirus symptoms after they catch the virus, and in this time, they can unknowingly pass it on to others, even if they don't have symptoms.

Self-isolating helps prevent family, friends and the community from contracting coronavirus, as well as helping to protect the health and care system.

These changes will:

- introduce a new duty on individuals to self-isolate if someone tests positive or is identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace.
- introduce a new Test and Trace Support Payment of a £500 lump sum payment for those on low incomes to support them if they cannot work during their self-isolation period.
- introduce penalties for those breaking the rules, including fines on a sliding scale from £1,000 up to a maximum of £10,000 for multiple breaches.
- place a new legal obligation on employers that they must not knowingly enable or encourage their employees to break the law on self-isolation.
- provide discretionary funding for local authorities to help those who require corresponding financial support to the Test and Trace Support Payment to self-isolate, but do not meet all of the eligibility criteria.

2. What difference does it make if self-isolation has a legal basis?

This change is intended to make clear the importance of people self-isolating when they have COVID-19, or know they have been in recent and close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. A new legal obligation, implemented rapidly nationwide, will help stop the virus continuing to spread.

3. What is the aim of the Test and Trace Support Payment?

The Test and Trace Support Payment has been introduced in response to feedback from local authorities and directors of public health that some of their residents were struggling to self-isolate as directed due to financial constraints. It is to help ensure that people on low incomes self-isolate when they test positive or are identified as a contact, and to encourage more people to get tested. This will help to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further societal and economic restrictions, including local lockdowns.

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4. Who will be eligible for the Test and Trace Support Payment?

To be eligible for the Test and Trace Support Payment, an individual must:

- have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace either because they've tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- be employed or self-employed;
- be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- be currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

5. How much is the payment?

Individuals who are required to self-isolate and who meet the benefits-linked eligibility criteria will be entitled to £500. This will be payable as a lump sum.

6. Will these payments be taxed?

These payments will be subject to income tax. They will not be subject to National Insurance contributions. We will work with local authorities on the appropriate process to ensure that central government can collect income tax.

7. How long will this be in place for?

The scheme will run until 31 January 2021. During this time, we will continue to review the efficacy of the scheme, including the impact of COVID-19 incidence levels.

8. When will this come into force?

These changes will come into effect on 28 September 2020, alongside the legal duty to self-isolate. Local authorities are expected to have their systems in place by 12 October; individuals who are eligible prior to that date will be able to make a backdated claim.

How will this work?

9. How will the duty to self-isolate be imposed?

The proposed legal duties will apply in England only. Anyone notified of a positive test result and any of their notified contacts will have a legal duty to self-isolate. Guidance will make clear that people who have symptoms should, as now, self-isolate while they get a test.

Those testing positive for COVID-19 will be legally obliged to self-isolate for a period ending 10 days after the onset of symptoms or, for people who did not have symptoms when they were tested, 10 days after the date of the test. Other members of their household will be legally obliged to self-isolate for a period ending 14 days after the onset of the infected person's symptoms (or, if they were asymptomatic, after the date of the test). Non-household contacts will be obliged to self-isolate for the period notified to them by NHS Test and Trace (the period ending 14 days after their most recent exposure to the person who has tested positive).

10. What is the role of local authorities in supporting the requirement to self-isolate?

NHS Test and Trace and local authorities will continue to work together to help ensure that people understand their obligations on self-isolation and why it is so important to self-isolate – and help them access any support they need to do so

Local authorities will focus on the principle of encouraging, educating and supporting self-compliance – they will not be expected to enforce the legal requirements. Local authorities should pass on the details of anyone they suspect of breaking the rules to the police. Where there is clear evidence that someone is not following the rules, the police will determine what follow-up action to take and, where necessary, issue fixed penalty notices.

11. What is the role of local authorities in administering the Test and Trace Support Payment?

Local authorities will deliver these payments to unitary authorities and district councils in two tier areas, with their costs reimbursed by the UK Government. This includes the administrative costs to set up and operate the scheme.

12. How will people apply for the Test and Trace Support Payment?

People will make an online application (or a telephone application if they are digitally excluded) and submit as supporting evidence:

- a notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate (this will include a Unique ID number);
- a bank statement; and

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- proof of employment, or, if they are self-employed, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact. We will work with local authorities to set out clear criteria as to how this will be defined.

We will agree with local authorities on Monday 21 September the most efficient and effective way of enabling people to make online applications – and how to manage applications from people who cannot apply online.

13. What does each local authority need to have in place to administer the Test and Trace Support Payment?

Local authorities will need to have staff in place to verify eligibility, process applications and make payments, and access to the right data sources (see below). We will determine at the first working group the most efficient way for local authorities to facilitate people making online applications.

14. What systems will be used to identify claimants and make payments?

Local authorities will need access to 'Searchlight' or an equivalent system that shows the benefits that people are entitled to, as well as access to NHS Test and Trace data, to identify if an individual has been asked to self-isolate. Central government will work with local authorities to ensure the necessary data sharing agreements are in place for you to use this information and administer the Test and Trace Support payment.

15. Will this depend on local authorities having access to new data sources?

In many cases, local authorities should have access to the data sources needed to deliver the scheme. Where this is not the case, you will be granted access to the necessary data and provided with guidance and support explaining how to access, and if needed, share, data sources. This includes making sure the necessary data sharing arrangements are in place and that information governance requirements are met. We will work with local authorities to identify and resolve data access and sharing issues in the regular working groups (See below).

16. Is there a best practice guide for how local authorities should set themselves up to administer the Test and Trace Support Payment?

DHSC will produce detailed guidance on the arrangements that local authorities will need to put in place. This will be shared with you shortly. Central government will continue to engage with local authorities to help set up the scheme. We welcome local authorities' thoughts on what other support you need to help you implement the scheme.

17. How many claims should local authorities be expecting to process?

This will depend on the level of COVID-19 incidence in your area. At current levels of incidence, we estimate that 800 people per day across England will be eligible for the Test and Trace Support Payment. If those cases were evenly distributed across the country, a local authority with 250,000 residents could expect four people per day to become eligible, though local authorities should prepare for at least double the number to account for unsuccessful applicants. At the start of the scheme, local authorities should also be prepared for a backlog of cases to work through.

18. How will claimants prove they are eligible, and what are local authorities expected to do to validate this?

Further guidance will be provided on the information governance and data sharing aspects of the scheme. Claimants will be asked to provide:

- a notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate (this will include a Unique ID number);
- a bank statement; and
- proof of employment, or, if they are self-employed, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.

Wherever possible, documents (e.g. bank statements) and evidence should be provided through online means. This means local authorities should accept scans, photographs, screenshots and downloads of documents (e.g. PDF downloads of bank statements).

Local authorities will verify the following:

- 'Applicant has been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace either because they've tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive' – local authorities will need to verify that the notification is valid, using data from the NHS Test and Trace service.
- 'Applicant is employed or self-employed' – This will be self-declared on the application. We will work with local authorities to confirm the most efficient way of checking that someone is not continuing to be paid and not continuing to work. For self-employed applicants, local authorities will need to be satisfied with submitted proof that the applicant's business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.
- 'Applicant is unable to work from home and will lose income as a result' – We will work with local authorities to determine the most efficient way of undertaking checks with employers. This will include looking at how to check that for self-employed applicants, their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.

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- ‘Applicant is currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit’ – local authorities will need to verify that the applicant receives one of these benefits using Searchlight, a Department for Work and Pensions system.

19. What is the discretionary fund for, how big is it, and should local authorities use it?

The discretionary fund will be for individuals who do not qualify for the Test and Trace Support Payment but require corresponding financial support to self-isolate – and further guidance will be shared with local authorities shortly.

If you have identified that someone may qualify for tax or benefit support that they are not currently claiming, you should advise them on how to do this.

20. Will local authorities be compensated for the administrative burden of administering the Test and Trace Support Payment?

Central government will cover the payments to eligible applicants, as well as the administration of the scheme. We will provide funding immediately to get the scheme running, and will provide additional funding to areas with high demand if it is required. Separately, we will provide discretionary funding – allowing local authorities flexibility to support individuals who require corresponding financial support to self-isolate while falling outside strict eligibility criteria – upfront for use over the four months of the scheme. We will provide more details about this shortly.

21. Do local authorities need to launch a communications campaigns to advertise the Test and Trace Support Payment?

Yes – it is important that people are made aware of this so that we ensure as many people as possible stay at home and self-isolate, if asked to do so by NHS Test and Trace. We will work with local authorities to help share best practice, including from the trial scheme.

22. Do all local authorities need to do this?

All unitary authorities and district councils in two tier areas must have a system in place to administer the Test and Trace Support Payment to eligible people.

23. Do local authorities need to check that Test and Trace Support Payment recipients are self-isolating?

Local authorities should focus on encouraging, educating and supporting self-isolation compliance. They should pass on the details of anyone they suspect of breaking the rules to the police.

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24. What should we do if we suspect fraud? Is it local authorities' job to follow up?

If local authorities suspect fraud, they should escalate this to the police who can determine what follow-up action to take.

25. If fraud does occur, does the risk lie with local authorities or central government?

Central government will cover local authorities' costs for administering the Test and Trace Support payment. Local authorities will have the right to recoup money from any recipients who do not adhere to the terms of the scheme. We will not seek to claw back the costs of irrecoverable fraud from local authorities.

When will this start?

26. What are the timelines for getting the Test and Trace Support Payment set up?

Local authorities should start preparing now. Central government will work with local authorities to help make sure they have access to HMRC, Searchlight, NHS Test and Trace data and any other scheme that will allow you to assess and verify applicants' eligibility

We will support local authorities to set up systems as quickly as possible, and no later than 12 October 2020.

27. Will payments be backdated?

Anyone who meets the eligibility criteria and is asked to self-isolate on or after 28 September will be entitled to the new payment, even if their local authority has not yet established the scheme. Where necessary, payments will be backdated from 28 September 2020.

28. What about people self-isolating on or after 28 September who were told to begin self-isolating before 28 September?

The scheme will apply to people notified to self-isolate on or after 28 September, not before that date.

29. When will more details be published?

The Government will provide more guidance shortly and engage with you in the week commencing 21 September 2020. This is to help you implement a system to administer the Test and Trace Support Payment.

30. Who should local authorities contact with questions?

DHSC will engage closely with local authorities to respond to questions. We will also set up a working group for local authorities which meets daily to discuss and resolve any operational issues as they arise. The first meeting will be on Monday 21 September.

31. How are local authorities meant to make these payments? Bank transfer, cheque?

Payments should be made by bank transfer to the bank account matching the bank statement provided by each claimant as part of their proof of eligibility. We will work with local authorities to determine the most efficient way to pay people without a bank account, or whose bank account is overdrawn.

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32. Do local authorities already have routine access to HMRC data to check if someone is eligible or not?

Local authorities can access HMRC data to check that a claimant is employed. We will work with every council to ensure they have legal cover to use this data for the purposes of the Test and Trace Support Payment. For applicants who are self-employed, the local authority will need to be satisfied with the evidence that is provided, including the self-assessment returns and trading income.

33. Will central government be providing a website template to local authorities?

We will determine at the first working group the most efficient way to facilitate people making online applications – and how to manage applications from people who cannot apply online.

34. Can someone make multiple claims if asked to isolate multiple times?

A claim can be made for each period of self-isolation required. All eligibility criteria must be met and supporting evidence provided.

35. How much will this cost?

The Government will fully fund these payments as well as the administration of the scheme. The total expenditure will considerably depend on the incidence of Covid-19 over the coming months. MHCLG and DHSC will be providing more information on the cost of the scheme as it is evaluated.