

Durham County Council Direct Payments Team FAQ

We are currently dealing with a large number of Direct Payments queries. We have listed some common queries and our responses. If your query is not answered below or you require further clarity, please contact us.

What is the best way for me to contact the Direct Payments Team?

The best way to contact us at present is by emailing . We are following national guidance in response to the Coronavirus outbreak. Accordingly, employees have been asked wherever possible to work from home. While we continue to prioritise essential services, it might take a bit longer than usual to reply to your email.

If you do not have access to email you can call us on 03000 268200 and leave a voicemail message. Someone will return your call as soon as possible.

In an emergency situation where care is urgently required, and usual care arrangements are not possible please call your social worker or Social Care Direct on 03000 267 979 or text message 07537 453 102.

I have decided to self-isolate and do not want my employee/s to work at this time. Can I still pay my employee?

We advise that you get some advice from the legal company attached to your insurance

Fish Insurance – Peninsula telephone 0844 8922 772

Premier Insurance – MSL – 0161 6032167

Where advice states that pay is discretionary, you, as the employer should make the decision. In most cases your Direct Payments budget should allow for this. If this is not the case please contact us to discuss this further.

If you want your employee to receive full pay you should mark the usual hours on the timesheet but clearly write 'EMPLOYER ISOLATING – FULL PAY' beside these hours.

I would like to temporarily reduce my Direct Payments package to reduce the risk to myself and my employee – Is this ok and what can I pay my PA?

If you feel like you can reduce your package without this being a risk to you then you can do this. You may have family members who are able to help out short term or aspects of the package that aren't possible at the moment e.g. accessing the community. You may have discussions with your employees around taking some holiday hours if this is an option or you may agree to pay them their usual wages if you feel this is reasonable.

We always advise when changing an employee's usual working pattern that you get advice from the legal company attached to your insurance

Fish Insurance – Peninsula telephone 0844 8922 772

Premier Insurance – MSL – 0161 6032167

You should ensure your social worker is aware of this temporary reduction in care as they will need to let us know so we can amend the amount of money you receive.

My employee is in a high risk category and is required to shield – can I still pay full pay?

We advise that you get some advice from the legal company attached to your insurance

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Where advice states that pay is discretionary, you, as the employer should make the decision. In most cases your Direct Payments budget should allow for this. If this is not the case please contact us to discuss this further.

If you want your employee to receive full pay you should mark the usual hours on the timesheet but clearly write 'EMPLOYEE ISOLATING – FULL PAY' beside these hours.

My employee is displaying symptoms of Covid 19 or lives with someone who is displaying these symptoms and therefore are required to self isolate. Are they entitled to be paid?

Anyone displaying symptoms of Covid 19 or who lives in a household with someone who is displaying symptoms must self-isolate for 14 days.

We advise that you get some advice from the legal company attached to your insurance

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Premier Insurance – MSL – 0161 6032167

Where advice is that pay is discretionary, you as the employer should make a decision you see as reasonable. In most cases, your Direct Payments budget should allow for this. If this is not the case please contact us to discuss this further.

If you want your employee to receive full pay you should mark the usual hours on the timesheet but clearly write 'EMPLOYEE ISOLATING – FULL PAY' beside these hours.

If you want the employee to receive statutory Sick pay you should write 'SSP COVID 19 ONLY'

Your employee could get a test to confirm if they have Covid 19. Please go to [gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested) for further guidance.

My Employee is unwell but is not displaying symptoms of Covid 19 – what should I do?

You should continue to follow your usual sickness procedure. Please ensure this is marked on the timesheet as 'REGULAR SICK' to ensure the payroll company is aware this is not Covid 19 related.

I am unwell and displaying signs of covid 19 but I still require care – what should I do?

You should inform your employee/s if you or someone in your household are displaying Covid 19 symptoms. It is very important the employee has adequate Personal Protective Equipment (see question on PPE below) to be able to carry out their role safely. You may be able to temporarily reduce your package to reduce the risk to your employees or a person in your household may be able to provide some care on a short term basis if this would not put you at risk.

Always ensure you get medical advice where required. You can do this by calling 111 or using the 111 online service 111.nhs.uk.

For any employment advice remember you can contact the legal company attached to your insurance

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Premier Insurance – MSL – 0161 6032167

My employee can not come to work and I need alternative care – what can I do?

There are two PA registers with details of people who are looking for work. You can access the register held by Accountability by calling them on 0191 4921222 or the locate register can be found at durhamlocate.org.uk by selecting care and support and then 'Personal Assistants'.

You can contact the Direct Payments team for recruitment support or to get the documents required to register a new employee. We can also advertise on your behalf if this is required. You may also wish to consider if you have a friend or family member who could provide care, even on a temporary basis via Direct Payments.

You could also look for a care agency to provide support. You can find details of care agencies in your area by going to durhamlocate.org.uk then selecting care and support, then selecting 'find care and support' and then 'Home/Domiciliary care.' You should make contact with the agency to see if they have capacity to provide care that can meet your needs.

I am not currently receiving care as I, or my employee, are self isolating and I am not using another employee or care provider to provide my care. I do not receive any other services – do I need to pay my client contribution?

Client contribution queries, where employees are involved, are being considered on an individual basis. Please contact us to discuss this further.

I usually use a day care provider, but they are unable to provide support at present. Do I still pay them?

If the agency is not providing you with a service, they should not be producing an invoice. The agency can contact us for clarity on this. Some agencies may be offering an amended or virtual service and if this is the case you should decide if you wish to access this service and discuss with your social worker to ensure they agree this will still meet your needs.

I received my money to pay my day care provider in one lump sum payment but some of this is now not required, what do I do with the money?

Please let us know via email if you received money in advance that is no longer required. We will let you know if the money should be returned to us or if it will be deducted from a future payment. It may take us some time to deal with this so please bear with us and keep the money in the bank account for now.

I am not receiving a service from my day care provider and have no other services; do I need to pay my client contribution?

No, you do not need to pay your client contribution at this time. Please email us to advise when you stopped receiving your service so we can check this has been processed correctly for you.

I need to provide my employees with keyworker letters as evidence they are required to work at this time, can you help?

Yes, please contact us if you require key worker letters confirming how many employees you have. We will send you templates to use. When you receive these, complete with the details and pass to your employee/s.

Should I be providing my employees with Personal Protective Equipment?

Yes you should ensure your employees have the correct PPE to carry out their role safely (gloves, aprons and masks where required) up to date guidance on PPE can be found at [.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe)

You should try to purchase this yourself; money can be reimbursed from the Direct Payments account (ensure you keep your receipts for audit). If you have a managed account, you should send the receipts to the payroll company who can arrange for the money to be reimbursed. If you are struggling to source PPE please contact us. We can suggest some alternative suppliers or in an emergency can provide you with a short supply to give you time to source some further products.

It is essential that you insist on good hygiene and ensure facilities are available for employees to regularly wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds.

Is my PA eligible for Covid 19 Testing?

For the latest guidance on testing eligibility and how to register for a test please visit [gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested).

If you require support to complete or send any necessary documents, please contact us on directpayments@durham.gov.uk or leave a voicemail on 03000 268200 and someone will be in touch to offer support.

Where can I get further advice?

We recommend [acas.org.uk/coronavirus](https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus) as a useful website for further information.