

Direct payments for children and young people

This information is in response to the Prime Minister's announcement of England's third national lockdown and the move to new national restrictions

On 04.01.2021 (last updated 14.01.2021) the government published further guidance at: [National lockdown: Stay at Home - GOV.UK](#)

Please find below advice from Public Health England which will help to keep you, your family and employees safe:

- Hands – wash your hands regularly and for at least 20 seconds
- Face – wear a face covering where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet and where social distancing is difficult
- Space – stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with. If this is not possible, stay 1 metre with extra precautions. This could be wearing face coverings or increasing ventilation indoors or using PPE such as masks, gloves or aprons.

The government has published [guidance on meeting others safely](#)

You can keep up to date with the latest government coronavirus advice, and follow the NHS guidance which is being kept up to date on their website:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

The most common symptoms of coronavirus are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough **and/or**
- high temperature **and/or**
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

To check the main symptoms of coronavirus please visit the NHS information page at: [Symptoms of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-symptoms/)

Further information is available from the Department of Health and Social Care guidance updated on 18 November 2020 at:

[Using direct payments during the coronavirus outbreak: full guidance for people receiving direct payments and personal assistants - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/using-direct-payments-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak)

COVID-19 vaccinations for personal assistants

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is being rolled out nationally by the NHS and in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly by Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust (RCHT).

Hospital hubs and GPs have been asked to vaccinate in line with the clinical priorities independently set by the Joint Committee of Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) on the groups that should be prioritised for vaccination.

Personal assistants are within the priority group of frontline health and social care workers who are eligible to receive the vaccine.

We are working closely with our Public Health Team to arrange COVID-19 vaccinations for personal assistants and agency provided staff working with disabled children and young people.

Once you have checked with your personal assistant and they have given their permission to share their name and email address for the sole purpose of booking a COVID-19 vaccine, we will send their contact details to RCHT.

Cornwall Council's Public Health Desk will send your personal assistant an email with a link for them to book their own vaccination. The email may go to into their spam folder, so you should ask your personal assistant to check this.

The booking link is for your personal assistant only. **They will need to book the appointment themselves via the link and should not share the booking link or book on behalf of anyone else.**

The list of names we have sent RCHT is confirmation of their employment as a personal assistant. Personal assistants should take a form of photo ID to verify their identity to their vaccination appointment. We have been advised that there is no need for them to verify their employment, only their identity.

The Vaccination Centre at RCHT will be aware of who has been invited to book an appointment and will turn people away if they have not been sent the booking link directly.

Unfortunately, RCHT are not able to invite parents or carers to register for a vaccine appointment at this stage.

We have also shared with Public Health the contact details of those agencies who provide support to children and young people receiving direct payments. Agency staff are also eligible to be offered a COVID-19 vaccination.

There is further information on the vaccination roll-out programme at:

[Priority groups for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination: advice from the JCVI, 30 December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

We know that you will be keen to find out about the developing COVID-19 vaccination programme in Cornwall. The Cornwall Council website will have more updates as information becomes available.

In the meantime you can find information about the COVID-19 vaccination online at www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination

COVID-19 testing with symptoms

Anyone with coronavirus symptoms can get a test.

If you have any coronavirus symptoms you can access a free test by calling 119 or visiting NHS.uk. There is further information at: [Getting tested for COVID-19 - Cornwall Council](#)

This test is different to the antibody test. The COVID-19 test will tell you if you have COVID-19 at the time you take the test. The antibody test will tell you if you have previously had COVID-19 and built up antibodies.

Asymptomatic testing for COVID-19

A government press release was published on 10.01.2021 relating to rapid regular testing for people without symptoms: [Asymptomatic testing to be rolled out across the country starting this week - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

COVID-19 antibody testing for personal assistants

Antibody testing is available across England and is being provided free of charge to personal assistants. The antibody test is a voluntary blood test which detects antibodies to the COVID-19 virus to see if you have previously had the virus and will inform government research. To sign up for an antibody test, PAs will need to [register on the online portal](#).

You cannot take the test if you currently have symptoms or have been advised to take the COVID-19 test.

Free access to the winter flu vaccination for personal assistants

All frontline health and social care workers are being encouraged to get the flu vaccination. This year, for the first time, PAs are eligible. They can access the vaccine free of charge from GPs and community pharmacies through the NHS Complementary Scheme.

To access the scheme, PAs will simply need to attend a GP surgery or community pharmacy. Sometimes people have been asked to provide proof of their entitlement to a free flu vaccination and there is a letter that can be used for identification.

Flu is a serious illness that can cause severe complications and death. Vaccination helps prevent individuals from getting flu or from spreading it to people who receive care and support.

The government has published promotional material about the flu immunisation programme which includes guidance for PAs.

Access to the guidance, a leaflet about free flu vaccinations and a letter of entitlement for PAs is available at: [flu immunisation guidance.pdf](#)

Can my personal assistant continue to provide support and spend time in our family home?

Personal Assistants are care workers and have been designated critical workers in the COVID-19 response. Personal Assistants can continue to go to work. PAs can continue to carry out their usual tasks and can spend time in your home. They must wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and you must complete a risk assessment.

The risk of transmission can be substantially reduced if COVID-19 secure guidelines are followed closely: There is further information at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes

COVID-19 brings extra risk and complexity. It may mean different ways of working which should always be risk-based. Your Employers Liability Insurance provider has risk-assessment tools and information on practical steps for personal assistants returning to work. If you need these please contact your insurance provider or your Personalisation Support Advisor.

Will my direct payments continue to be paid?

Yes. The usual four weekly payments will continue to be made to the designated DP bank account. We will not stop the regular payments, unless you have asked us to do so or we have had a conversation with you.

Some families have received no PA, agency or childcare support over the past few months. Because of this have asked for their direct payments to be temporarily suspended.

Do make sure that you are using the contingency amount (eight weeks of DP funds) for support if you need to.

If you wish to return unused direct payment funds, please contact your Personalisation Support Adviser. In the future we will discuss with you the balance of funds you have in the DP account through our review process. If necessary, we will use our usual process to recover funds over your DP contingency amount.

Using direct payments

We expect funds to continue to be used for the support set out in the Child Plan or Education, Health & Care Plan. These plans specify how direct payment funds are to be used to meet your child or young person's assessed needs. We expect families to continue with their usual arrangements wherever possible. You may need extra precautions in relation to hygiene and infection control. Where you provide personal assistants with personal protective equipment (PPE), please use your DP funds to do this.

For many families their usual personal assistant support has continued throughout the pandemic. Where this was not possible, many families took a creative approach and discussed with their PA the support that could be provided. During the previous lockdowns, many personal assistants stayed in regular video or telephone contact. We encourage you to make these arrangements again if face to face contact is not suitable.

Clinically extremely vulnerable people are being advised not to go to work outside their homes during lockdown. This may apply to your personal assistant.

We encourage families to discuss with their PA the best way in which support can be delivered. We encourage families to continue to pay personal assistants their average wages. We are keen for personal assistants not to be at a disadvantage during the current lockdown.

If you use casual or zero hours workers and work has not already been agreed in advance, you do not have to offer them work during this time.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As an employer you remain under an obligation to ensure that there is a safe system of work in place. You can insist on greater standards of hygiene and care.

Accessing appropriate personal protective equipment for your personal assistants needs to be considered. If you are unsure what PPE you should buy, or if you have difficulty getting it, please contact your allocated worker.

You can use your direct payment funds to buy PPE for your personal assistants. Please keep all receipts as evidence of DP expenditure.

If your child or young person receives a personal health budget, or support is being delivered from an agency or a childminder, it is for them to advise, source and purchase the PPE depending on individual circumstances.

The government guidelines are being updated and the advice on topics such as PPE changes. You should follow advice on the government and NHS websites.

The Department of Health and Social Care has information on PPE: [wearing the right PPE](#)

Will direct payment funds be recovered if the balance is over the contingency amount?

At direct payment review discussions, we are checking with you the balance of funds held in the direct payments account. We will follow our usual process to recover funds over your DP contingency amount.

If you wish to return unused direct payment funds, please contact your Personalisation Support Adviser.

For most families, the usual four weekly payments have continued to be made to the designated DP bank account.

The payment dates for funds to be paid into DP accounts for 2021 is on our website: www.cornwall.gov.uk/directpaymentsforms

Using direct payments to employ and pay an adult family member living in your household

Most families continue to use their direct payment as agreed in the child plan. There were circumstances where families needed to arrange different support as a result of the previous lockdowns.

We took a flexible approach as we were keen to avoid families having no PA support. Where it continued to meet the needs, we agreed on an individual basis that family members could be paid from DP funds to provide ongoing support. This helps to keep safe those who are vulnerable. This needs to be agreed by a Team Manager, so please discuss any changes to PAs with your allocated worker.

Please contact your allocated worker if your personal assistant will not be providing support. They can discuss the various options that may be available so that you are able to maintain the support you need.

DBS checks for temporary personal assistants who are paid from DP funds

During the previous lockdowns we were keen to make sure that the DBS process was not a barrier to families who needed to make alternative support arrangements. During the current lockdown, we will agree these same terms if you are without your usual PA:

1. If a relative or friend (living outside of the child's home) is paid as PA to provide support for the short term, (defined as up to one month), the PA does not need to undertake a DBS check.
2. If a relative or friend is living in the same household as the DP child, and is supporting for the short term, (defined as up to one month). The PA does not need to undertake a DBS check.
3. If a relative or a friend is supporting longer term, they will need to complete the DBS online application and provide evidence of their identity via video calling facilities, for example WhatsApp. They can then be paid from DP funds once their identity had been provided and checked by us. We will not wait for the DBS Bureau to issue their DBS notification.

Safeguarding of our children and young people is paramount. Our usual practice is to undertake enhanced DBS checks for all personal assistants who you wish to recruit to support your child.

Please contact your Personalisation Support Advisor if you would like more information on the DBS process.

DBS identity checks for personal assistants

We are continuing to check applicant's identity using video verification of documents.

This means that we do not see the applicant's original identity documents as we would usually.

Please ask your personal assistant to show you the original versions of these documents before they start working for you. These will be the same documents they provided as evidence of identity via remote video verification. In some cases where information is not clear, we may need to see original documents.

Support from the team

We have continued to provide help and support to families by keeping in regular contact. This may have been from a home visit, telephone or video call. Once the current restrictions are eased, we will once again arrange home visits. In the meantime, we will carry out most reviews via telephone or video calls.

We continue to make significant savings by reducing the amount of printing. Thank you for providing us with your email address so that information can be sent to you. If your email address changes, please let us know. Guidance and forms are also available on our web page: www.cornwall.gov.uk/directpaymentsforms

Please continue to complete the DP expenditure sheets electronically and send these to your Personalisation Support Advisor by email, rather than by post.

You can reach us by email or mobile phone. Your Employers Liability Insurance providers are also able to assist with any employment queries you may have.

If you have any concerns, please contact us and we will ensure a member of the Disabled Children & Therapy Service contacts you.

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This information is for guidance only and legal advice should always be taken.