



Direct payments for children and young people

This information is in response to the government's announcement of the new national restrictions which started on 5th November 2020 to help control the spread of the virus

Cases of COVID-19 are currently lower in Cornwall than in other parts of the country, but we all need to play our part in protecting each other and the NHS

On 31.10.2020 (updated on 06.11.2020) the government published further guidance at: www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november The government advises there are three simple actions we must all do to keep on protecting each other:

Wash your hands, cover your face, make space

- hands – wash your hands regularly and for 20 seconds
- face – wear a face covering in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult, and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet
- space – stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings or increasing ventilation indoors).

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/

If you have any coronavirus symptoms; high temperature, a new continuous cough, or a loss or change in your sense of taste or smell, get a free test by calling 119 or visiting NHS.uk.

Further information is available from the Department of Health and Social Care guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for people receiving direct payments updated on 11.09.2020 at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-people-receiving-direct-payments

COVID-19: priority testing for personal assistants

As **essential workers**, personal assistants can apply for priority testing through GOV.UK by following the guidance on testing for essential workers. Further information is available at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested#who-can-be-tested

COVID-19 antibody testing for personal assistants

Antibody testing is now 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.

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

Skills for Care have provided further information for personal assistants, available [here](#) (please note that information from Skills for Care is for personal assistants to adults and not children, but many things equally apply).

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 and for the first time, this year, PAs are eligible and will be able to 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, 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 **key workers** in the Covid-19 response and can therefore continue to go to work. PAs can continue to carry out their usual tasks and can spend time in your home if they wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and you have completed 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 additional risk and complexity and may necessitate some different ways of working which should always be risk-based. We understand the Employers Liability Insurance providers have risk-assessment tools and information on practical steps for personal assistants returning to work. If these resources may be helpful, 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 and 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 this is needed.

If you wish to return unused or surplus direct payment funds, please contact your Personalisation Support Adviser for details on how to do this. In the future we will discuss with you the balance of funds you have in the DP account, and if necessary, use our usual process to recover funds in excess of 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, putting in additional precautions in relation to hygiene and infection control, and providing personal assistants with personal protective equipment where this is needed.

For many families their usual, regular 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 first lockdown, many personal assistants stayed in regular video or audio contact with children and young people, and we would encourage you to make these arrangements again if face to face contact is not suitable.

Those who are classed as clinically extremely vulnerable are being strongly advised not to go to work outside their homes during lockdown. This may apply to your personal assistant.

We're encouraging families to discuss with their PA the best way in which support can be delivered and to continue to pay personal assistants their average wages. We are keen for personal assistants not to be disadvantaged during this second lockdown.

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 choose to insist on greater standards and hygiene and care from your personal assistants.

Accessing appropriate personal protective equipment for your personal assistants needs to be considered. If you are unsure what PPE you should purchase, or if you have difficulties in sourcing it, please contact your allocated worker. You can use your direct payment funds to purchase PPE for your personal assistants. Please keep all receipts as these will be needed to evidence 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 continually being updated and the advice on topics such as PPE changes regularly. We strongly advise that you follow advice on the government and NHS websites.

The Department of Health and Social Care guidance: Using direct payments during the coronavirus outbreak: full guidance for people receiving direct payments and personal assistants updated on 11.09.2020 provides information on PPE for direct payment recipients: [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 and will follow our usual process to recover funds in excess of your DP contingency amount.

If you wish to return unused or surplus direct payment funds, please contact your Personalisation Support Adviser for details on how to do this.

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 2020 and 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, but there were circumstances where families needed to arrange support differently as a result of the first lockdown.

We took a flexible approach as we were keen to avoid families having no PA support, and 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.

Please contact your allocated worker if your personal assistant will not be providing support during this second lockdown to 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 first lockdown 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 this again 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

If you wish to recruit a new personal assistant, we are continuing to verify an applicant's identity using remote video verification for document identity checks. This means that we do not see the applicant's original identity documents, as we would do in usual circumstances.

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 with a member of our team).

Support from the Team

We have continued to provide effective 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, but 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 pages: www.cornwall.gov.uk/directpaymentsforms

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

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.

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

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