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**Coronavirus (COVID-19) HR Policy Frequently Asked Questions**

**Updated: October 15 2020**

**Keep Wales safe:**

* always observe social distancing
* wash your hands regularly
* if you meet another household, outside your extended household, stay outdoors
* work from home if you can

Stay at home and [**get tested**](https://gov.wales/apply-coronavirus-covid-19-test) if you or anyone in your extended household has [**symptoms**](https://gov.wales/check-if-you-need-coronavirus-medical-help).

These FAQs provide an enhanced and updated version of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) HR Policy Guidance.

This update includes:

* Additional information on circumstances when employees may need to self-isolate (1.1);
* Further advice on personal insurance implications of working from home (2.20)
* Updated advice on balancing caring responsibilities and work (3.7 – 3.9)

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Anyone who develops a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or loss of or change to sense of smell and/or taste, should **stay at home for at least 10 days.** You shouldn’t go to your GP, or to a pharmacy or hospital. Nor should you contact the NHS on 111. You should only seek help if you can’t cope with your symptoms at home, if your condition worsens significantly, or if you don’t recover within 7 days. If your symptoms are no better after 7 days, or if you experience breathlessness or vomiting, or if fatigue stops you doing your normal daily activities, contact NHS 111 online. If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. For a medical emergency, dial 999. Anyone who lives in the same household as someone displaying symptoms should **stay at home for 14 days**.

This document brings together the latest information available from Public Health Wales (PHW), along with the Welsh and UK Governments. Your wellbeing remains an absolute priority and we will continue to keep you informed through these FAQs, briefings, and staff emails.

Managers are reminded to be flexible and sensitive to individual circumstances in their conversations with colleagues who may be affected by coronavirus.

***To quickly find what you’re looking for, press Ctrl F to bring up the navigation pane then type in the term you’re looking for.***

**The latest information and advice is available from:**

[The Welsh Government](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid19)

[Public Health Wales](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/)

[NHS Direct Wales Coronavirus (COVID-19) Symptom Checker](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/SelfAssessments/symptomcheckers/COVID19.aspx)

[UK Government](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response)

## **Section 1 – Sickness Absence and Supporting Attendance**

**1.1 Who should self-isolate, and for how long?**

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of a new continuous cough and/or high temperature or loss or change to your sense of smell or taste. Employees with symptoms can also access priority [testing](https://gov.wales/apply-coronavirus-covid-19-test).

**If you live alone**

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, you must self-isolate at home for at least 10 days from when your symptoms started. Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital. You should arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19.

If you are not experiencing symptoms but have tested positive for COVID-19 you also must self-isolate for at least 10 days, starting from the day the test was taken. If you develop symptoms during this isolation period, you must restart your 10-day isolation from the day you develop symptoms.

After 10 days, if you still have a temperature you must continue to self-isolate and seek medical advice. You do not need to continue to self-isolate after 10 days if you only have a cough or loss of smell or taste, as these symptoms can last for several weeks after the infection has gone.

**If you live with others**

All other household members must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill or if they do not have symptoms, from the day their test was taken. If anyone else in the household starts displaying symptoms, they must stay at home for at least 10 days from when their symptoms appear, regardless of what day they are on in their original 14-day isolation period.

If you live with others and you are the first in the household to have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), then you must stay at home for at least 10 days. All other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

If you have symptoms, you should stay as far away from other members of your household as possible. It is especially important to stay away from anyone who is at risk or clinically vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus (shielding) with whom you share a household.

Reduce the spread of infection in your home by washing your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser, and cover coughs and sneezes.

Following a positive test result, you will be contacted by a contact tracer on behalf of the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect service. You will only be contacted after you have had a positive test.

If you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, then use the NHS 111 Wales online coronavirus service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111 Wales. For a medical emergency dial 999.

If you develop symptoms again at any point after ending your first period of isolation (self or household) then you must follow the same guidance on self-isolation again. Read ending self-isolation and/or household-isolation) for further information.

**For more detailed advice, including arranging a test or ending self-isolation, please refer to the** [**WG Guidance on Self-Isolation for Households with Possible Coronavirus**](https://gov.wales/self-isolation-stay-home-guidance-households-possible-coronavirus)**.**

**Other circumstances when employees should self-isolate:**

* If an employee is contacted by the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect service because they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus they should begin self-isolation for 14 days from their last contact with the person who has tested positive. If the employee gets notified while at work they should leave work to self‑isolate straight away and, if possible, wear a face covering en route and avoid public transport.
* If an employee returns to the UK following international travel for any reason, they will need to serve a 14 day quarantine period unless they are exempt from this or have travelled from one of the [list of countries](https://gov.wales/exemptions-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19-html) that are exempt from the 14-day quarantine regulations. Further information is available at [Coronavirus (COVID-19): Travellers Exempt from Welsh Border Rules](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19)
* If advised to do so by their hospital / health care provider prior to the employee (or a member of their household) undergoing surgery or some other medical procedure. Employees should discuss any need to self-isolate with their line manager as soon as they become aware of this and prior to the self-isolation period starting.

**Fit for work while in self-isolation**

If an employee needs to self isolate but is otherwise fit for work, they should complete the [COVID-19 Self-isolation form](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Policies-Guidance-Resources/SitePages/Staff-Reporting-Covid-19-Symptoms.aspx). If the employee is fit enough to work from home then they should do so, if this can be supported by the business. If this cannot be supported, then paid special leave would apply and further guidance will be provided on groups that cannot work from home in due course. Where they are too ill to work it should be recorded as sickness absence.

**1.2 What happens if an employee displays coronavirus symptoms again after an earlier period of self-isolation?**

Coronavirus presents a significant spectrum of symptoms from very mild to severe. It is not currently possible to state with certainty, until a test is carried out, whether an individual experiencing symptoms has had the virus.

Employees experiencing any of the symptoms at any stage should continue to follow the advice on the NHS website to check their symptoms, stay at home and follow social distancing guidance (working from home where possible) as appropriate. This applies where they have previously experienced symptoms and already followed the self-isolation guidance as, until a test, it is not possible to confirm if they have the virus at this or previous/subsequent periods of illness.

**1.3 Can I be tested for COVID-19?**

Yes, anyone who is **currently displaying symptoms** can receive a test. As a Welsh Government employee, you and one other person form your household can request priority testing for critical workers which includes all civil servants for testing purposes. You will be given details of how to apply for priority testing when you complete the [COVID-19 Self-isolation form](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Policies-Guidance-Resources/SitePages/Staff-Reporting-Covid-19-Symptoms.aspx). The test will determine if you have COVID-19 but not test if you may have had the virus in the past and recovered. Testing will allow you and your managers to make informed decisions about whether you should remain in isolation, or return to work (where appropriate). Other members of your household who require a test will need to request this via the [NHS testing portal](https://www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test) that is open to members of the general public.

We expect WG employees who meet the criteria (i.e. who have coronavirus symptoms) to take a test **where available**. The testing will follow the guidance set out by Public Health Wales and will initially be deployed to health and social care staff and to the wider group of critical workers where there is risk to business continuity for critical infrastructure or service delivery.  Public Health Wales and Local Health Boards will determine the timing and priority for testing based on their own criteria and capacity.

**1.4 When can I be tested?**

You should get tested in the first three days of coronavirus symptoms appearing, although testing is considered effective up until day five. No testing should be undertaken after day five, unless it’s for a specific reason which will be agreed on a case by case basis by local microbiologists.

**Negative tests and returning to work**

Even if you have had a negative result, it’s important to still apply caution. If everyone with symptoms who was tested in their household receives a negative result, you can return to work if your work cannot be done from home, providing you are well enough, and have not had a fever for 48 hours.

**1.5 I’m worried my absence may mean I hit an absence trigger point?**

If you are absent through illness because you have acute symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), this will not affect your trigger points.

**1.6 If I am absent with Coronavirus (COVID-19) or flu, do I need a GP certificate to confirm my absence?**

You can normally self-certify sickness absence for seven days or less but must cover week two onwards with a GP’s ‘Fit Note’. For now, we are not asking you to contact your GP for a ‘Fit Note’. If you are ill with either a high temperature or a new, continuous cough, your line manager will instead accept extended self-certificates for the entire period of the absence. Your manager will keep in touch with you for the duration of the absence.

**1.7 What if I’m at high risk of developing serious illness if I’m exposed to coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

‘Shielding’ is a measure to protect people who are clinically considered to be extremely vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus by minimising all interaction between them and others to reduce the risk of infection. People with [serious underlying health conditions](https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html), which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), may be advised to rigorously follow shielding measures when coronavirus infection rates are rising in order to keep themselves safe. Welsh Government [advice](https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html) sets out more detail on who may be more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 and may need to shield at any given time.

Note: [shielding came to an end in Wales on 16 August 2020](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/inline-documents/2020-07/Letter.pdf) and those who have previously followed shielding advice can now follow the [same rules](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance) as the rest of the population

**1.8 If I am shielding, can I work from home?**

You should follow the [latest Welsh Government advice on shielding](https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html). As of 16 August 2020, those who have previously had to shield no longer need to do so. If you need to shield in future, and can safely work from home then this should be encouraged. Opting for video-conferencing or tele-conferencing where possible instead of holding meetings is a practical precaution. This [guide](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29640820/document/versions/published) will help you make the most from your ICT at home, while this [guide](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29355542/document/versions/published) on working from home offers good advice on working in isolation.

**1.9 I need to shield but can’t work from home because for example, I have no internet connection, live in shared accommodation or it isn’t feasible to do so. What are my options?**

You should follow the [latest Welsh Government advice on shielding](https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html). As of 16 August 2020, those who have previously had to shield no longer need to do so. If you need to shield in future, and alternative work locations that may be possible for people who are not shielding are not appropriate for you due to physical distancing requirements, then you should receive paid special leave. Your line manager should retain contact with you while you are shielding to support your wellbeing.

**1.10** **What is test, trace and protect?**

[NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect](https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect) is the Welsh Government’s approach to testing and contact tracing which will help citizens of Wales to resume their normal lives gradually and safely. Test, Trace, Protect will work by:

* testing those people who have coronavirus symptoms, asking them to isolate from wider family, friends, co-workers and their community whist taking a test and waiting for a result
* tracing those individuals who have been in close contact with the person who has tested positive for coronavirus, requiring them to take precautions and self-isolate (for 14 days)
* providing advice and guidance, particularly where the person who has tested positive or their contacts are vulnerable or at greater risk
* ensuring that if the individual tests negative and the symptoms are not due to coronavirus, individuals can get back to work and their normal routines as soon as possible

Test, Trace, Protect will be delivered through the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect service which includes a number of public sector partners working together to help contain the spread of the virus. Together, Public Health Wales, local Health Boards, Local Authorities, and NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS) will be responsible for implementing one of the biggest public health interventions in a generation.

For further information, visit [**Test, Trace, Protect: your questions**](https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect-your-questions).

## **Section 2 – Attendance at Work, Homeworking and Travel**

**2.1 What arrangements are in place for my return to the office?**

The health, safety and well-being of our staff is at the heart of all our planning on safe working - at home and in our buildings

A tailored charter for each building to outline the changes in way the office will operate under coronavirus restrictions.  This will include access arrangements, space allocation, expectations for individual and team behaviour in the office, application of social distancing, emergency arrangements, etc.

Our priority is to enable **critical business functions** to operate and allow some colleagues who would benefit from being away from home for significant well-being or welfare reasons to work from an office location for at least part of the time.

Colleagues in Facilities, Health and Safety and TUS have worked together with Building SROs to carry out **detailed surveys and risk assessments** of our offices – as well as a full organisational-level risk assessment which is required by law.

Please find below the links to the 4 Main Hub Individual Building Charters, which outline detail information on the safe operation within the buildings at this time:

[https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Policies-Guidance-Resources/SitePages/Keeping-each-other-safe-in-the-office.aspx](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwales365uk.sharepoint.com%2Fsites%2FIntranet-Policies-Guidance-Resources%2FSitePages%2FKeeping-each-other-safe-in-the-office.aspx&data=02%7C01%7CGarethA.Owen%40gov.wales%7C2fcc4029933b4cd75b3908d833b78516%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C637316210587034753&sdata=wx%2FGPqDf6YfRvfk5enfyAit5wQGksD0HkaWov8nEuxU%3D&reserved=0)

**2.2 How can we encourage good hygiene to minimise the risk of contracting coronavirus to protect those employees who are required to attend the workplace?**

Welsh Government have published a range of media explaining our approach to safely re-opening our offices across Wales. For further information, please visit the following intranet pages: <https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Policies-Guidance-Resources/SitePages/Keeping-each-other-safe-in-the-office.aspx>

 Anyone who is identified as being in a business critical role or needs to attend one of our four main office hubs to work due to personal circumstances will receive a confirmation pack along with a copy of the Building Charter. You will also be required to watch a virtual re-orientation session that sets out the expectations required of everyone who works in a Welsh Government building. You will also be required to sign an agreement form confirming that you will abide by all measures in place to ensure your safety.

All toilet and washing facilities should contain soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub to allow users to wash and dry their hands, which can help eliminate or reduce the risk of the virus spreading. Employees should minimise touching their face and follow the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ advice for coughing and sneezing to help stem coronavirus infections and the spread of germs.

Employees should wash their hands frequently and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, for example when they arrive at the workplace, before and after using vending machines and other office machinery (e.g. printers and photocopiers etc.). Items of kitchen equipment (e.g. cutlery, mugs) should not be shared, and should be cleaned after use.

The on-site cleaning should meet high hygienic standards. Any dissatisfaction with office cleanliness should be addressed quickly through facilities management. Employees need to dispose of their rubbish, put away personal items and not leave dirty cutlery around the office. Cleaning teams are not allowed to touch personal items so they will clean round them, but they won’t move them.

**2.3 What if someone is worried about their future return to the workplace?**

At present, the default position for all employees is to work from home where possible, other than for specific essential roles or where home does not provide a safe workplace.

Managers should be listening to any concerns employees may have about returning to work and should take steps to protect everyone.

**2.4 An employee with an impairment or long-term health condition is worried about coming into work or travelling for work because they are more susceptible to infections and the impact of the coronavirus. What should we do?**

If an employee whose impairment or health condition places them at additional risk in travelling to or attending an office cannot do their job or another suitable role (either within or outside of their Division) from home or another suitable location in a way that enables them to stay 2m away from others, managers should carefully assess their level of risk.  They will also need to discuss with the employee their particular workplace adjustments and health and wellbeing needs and keep the situation under review in light of emerging Government advice, business requirements and personal circumstances. Special leave with pay should be given where the on-site risk is unacceptable and there are no suitable home-based roles.

**2.5 What should be done if an employee undertaking an essential role will not come to the office/workplace as they are concerned about contracting coronavirus?**

In line with the Government’s advice on unnecessary travel, Welsh Government’s position is for employees to work from home where this is practical. Employees attending the workplace should follow the guidance on handwashing and respiratory hygiene, the relevant social distancing measures and government/transport provider guidance on safe travel on public transport. Some people might be anxious about safety and returning to the workplace. Managers should encourage employees to talk to them about any concerns they have, and try to resolve them together.

Employees are required to notify absence in accordance with usual procedures. If an employee does not attend work when they are expected the manager should contact them. If the reason for the absence is concern about coronavirus, it is essential to discuss the employees concerns and in particular to cover:

* how health and safety is being reviewed and managed – you should share the latest relevant building charter
* any planned adjustments to the workplace, for example additional hand washing and drying facilities, or floor markings to help people maintain social distancing
* individual circumstances and concerns or anxieties, particularly regarding both their physical safety, their psychological safety, and their mental health.

Travel arrangements must be safe for the employee and also comply with the Government’s instructions on essential travel.

If someone still feels concerned about returning to the workplace, they may be able to arrange with their manager to take the time off as holiday or unpaid leave.

If someone refuses to attend work without a valid reason, it could in some cases lead to disciplinary action. However, managers should make every effort to resolve cases in a way which shows compassion and empathy for an individual’s concerns and which reflects the latest medical and health advice and should consult the [Case Advisory Team](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/HR-Case-Advisory-team.aspx) to discuss further options.

**2.6       Do I need to wear a face covering in the office?**

There is a national requirement for all people over the age of 11 to wear face coverings in indoor places, such as in shops and workplaces where social distancing is not possible or difficult to observe. Employers are under a legal duty to put physical distancing measures in place in Wales. The main Welsh Government offices currently open **do** meet the social distancing recommendations, so there is no requirement to wear a mask, though you can choose to wear one if you’d prefer.

Face coverings are mandatory for use on Public Transport in Wales. If you chose to commute by public transport then you will need to ensure that you comply with this mandatory requirement at your own expense. However, if you are required to travel on public transport for business purposes (not including your daily commute) then you can pick up a face covering from your local Facilities team.

If PPE is specifically required for business purposes in one of the extremely limited roles where this might apply, then it will be provided free of charge to employees who need it. Any PPE provided must fit properly.

**2.7 Can I be furloughed?**

No Welsh Government employee will be furloughed.

**2.8 When will my local office be open again?**

The health, safety and well-being of our staff is at the heart of all our planning on safe working, at home and in our buildings. **From the end of July** we will test our plans for limited, safe working from our buildings in our four main office hubs – Cathays Park, Merthyr Tydfil, Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction. In this early phase of transition, we expect **fewer than 20%** of our staff to be working from the office at some point in the week – and not necessarily every day or for a whole day. Initially, this 20% will be made up of colleagues whose roles or functions are more effectively carried out from an office base. There will also be small numbers of people who, due to their personal circumstances, need to work from an office location for **some of the time** in the early part of transition.

If you are working from home, please check your house insurance allows covers you to do so. See 2.20 for more information.

**2.9 During the transitional working arrangements my normal base is not open and I will be attending a different WG office. Can I claim T&S for these journeys?**

If you are required to work out of an alternative WG office for business-critical reasons and have incurred additional costs as a result of a longer commute, you may claim these via the eT&S system. However if you are attending the office purely on welfare grounds, you will not be allowed to reclaim any travel costs.

**2.10 I’m not part of the transition pilot but need to access the office for a business critical reason or short term wellbeing need. Can I do this?**

Our default position is that you should continue to work from home wherever possible but we also understand there may be occasions when you have legitimate reasons for ad-hoc access to one of our offices, even if you are not part of the pilot. For example, this could beto attend an office to complete or co-ordinate a one-off task that can’t be completed from home such as distributing PPE equipment to stakeholders.

Please read the [Ad-hoc Attendance](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA31065540/document/versions/published) guide to familiarise yourself with the procedures in place for each office as they may differ between locations. Please don’t attend the offices without approval in advance or you may be turned away.

Attendance to collect non-business critical or personal items is still not currently permitted during the pilot.

**2.11 Will there be any changes to the car parking arrangements across the estate?**

In responding to the challenges of COVID-19 and with reduced numbers of people likely to be working from **Cathays Park** we have agreed with Trade Union Side to suspend the ‘Team of Four’ parking arrangements. Therefore, until further notice parking at Cathays Park will change temporarily to ‘first come, first served’.

You must be an eligible user of CP2 parking facilities and you will still need to present both your Welsh Government building pass and your up-to-date parking permit. If you are unable to produce either of these, we will not be able to grant access to the on-site parking facilities.

Only the ‘P’ parking spaces will be available on a ‘first-come-first served basis’. Mobility and Contractor parking arrangements are not included in this temporary change.

Given the circumstances we have also decided to suspend external visitor and visitor officer spaces. Again, until further notice these spaces will allocated for the exclusive use of staff working in the ECCW.

If you have any car parking questions, please email the **CP Car Parking Queries mailbox**.

**2.12 Am I able to use the post room to send mail out?**

If you’re working in one of the offices that are open, yes. Where offices are closed there will be no outward postal service available for use, staff who need to use the postal function must do so themselves via a post office. Staff will be reimbursed via e-payments for the cost of any postage using their divisional cost codes.

**2.13 Should I be travelling to offices or for meetings?**

You should not consider travelling to the offices, for meetings or events unless they are absolutely essential. You should be utilising the ‘smart working’ tools instead, Options include Skype or MS Teams audio and video conferencing.

**2.14 What if I become ill whilst travelling for business? Should I be advised to return home or should I stay in the hotel? If in the hotel, will Welsh Government pay?**

If you have travelled for meetings or events classed as absolutely necessary, you should return home if possible and appropriate.  You can use a hire car if you are well enough to drive, or encourage family/friends to pick you up – if safe to do so.  Your Deputy Director should use their judgement and discretion on a case-by-case basis responding to individual circumstances and needs.  WG will pay costs of extended hotel stays, if needed.

**2.15 I am concerned about travelling for meetings and events? What should I do?**

You should not consider travelling for meeting and events unless they are absolutely essential. Instead, consider other options including Skype, audio and video conferencing.

**Travelling Abroad**

**2.16 I have asked my manager for one week’s annual leave to cover a week’s holiday abroad to a country or territory that still has travel restrictions and no travel corridor is in place. Must I take annual leave to cover the quarantine period also? Can my request for annual leave be refused?**

In deciding whether to allow annual leave, the manager can take account of the impact of annual leave and absence due to quarantine on business delivery. If the impact cannot be supported managers can refuse annual leave in accordance with the department’s annual leave policy. At the earliest opportunity before taking leave employees and managers should consider whether the employee can work from home during the quarantine period, and what steps might be needed to make this possible.

Employees can discuss with their managers all practical options to cover the quarantine period, including working from home where possible. Only where this is not possible, should other options to cover the period be considered. This may include temporary changes to working patterns, or finding non-operational work which can be completed at home rather than in the office, before using annual or flexi leave or agreeing special leave without pay. Employees are expected to follow FCO advice and guidance on [travelling abroad](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and check the latest [Welsh Government quarantine advice](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) for the country being visited.

**2.17 An employee is travelling abroad to a country or territory that still has travel restrictions and no travel corridor is in place for compassionate reasons. They will need to serve a quarantine period overseas and again when they return to the UK. How do I treat the periods of quarantine?**

If you agree that there are compassionate reasons for travel, you should apply the same approach to both periods of quarantine as each is outside of the employee’s control.

You should explore options for working during the quarantine period with your team member. Whilst this is more difficult to arrange overseas due to IT and security issues, there may still be research and L&D opportunities that can be pursued using publicly available material. If it is not possible to work during the quarantine periods you can allow special leave with pay.

**2.18 Whilst on holiday to a country covered by a** [**COVID-19 ‘travel corridor’**](https://gov.wales/exemptions-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19-html) **exemption, there is a change in FCO advice and the UK quarantine rules which means my employee will now have to quarantine on entering the UK. What should I do?**

Employees are expected to follow FCO advice and guidance on [travelling abroad](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and check the latest [Welsh Government quarantine advice](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) for the country being visited. If they are unable to work from home on return, managers, in discussion with their employee, should explore all practical options including temporary changes to working patterns, or finding non-operational work that the employee can complete at home rather than in the office. Only where this is not possible, should managers look at options to cover the period, through special leave with pay

**2.19 Whilst abroad, there is a change in the foreign country’s situation and my employee is unable to return to the UK. Can I grant special leave while they are trapped abroad?**

Employees are expected to follow FCO advice and guidance on [travelling abroad](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and check the latest [Welsh Government quarantine advice](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) for the country being visited. Departments should refer to their Travel Disruption policies where available to cover the extended period overseas. Whilst trapped abroad the employee may receive special leave with pay as this situation is outside their control. On return to the UK, they may also have to quarantine, but you should check the Welsh Government guidance on the [exemptions where quarantine does not apply](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19).

Following the employee’s return to the UK, if they are required to quarantine on [entering to the UK](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) and they are unable to work from home, managers, in discussion with their employee, should explore all practical options including temporary changes to working patterns, or finding non-operational work that the employee can complete at home rather than in the office. Only where this is not possible, should managers look at options to cover the period, through using annual or flexi leave, or agree special leave with/without pay depending on individual circumstances.

**Working from Home (including ICT)**

**2.20 Do I need to tell my insurance provider that I’m working from home?**

According to the [Association of British Insurers](https://www.abi.org.uk/news/news-articles/2020/08/insurers-commit-to-extending-covid-19-customer-pledges/#:~:text=Pledges%20made%20by%20members%20of%20the%20Association%20of,insurer%20to%20update%20or%20extend%20their%20cover%20arrangements.) (ABI), working from home should be covered by standard home insurance policies, if the work is clerical (using a computer, making calls, paperwork) in nature.

We recommend you check your insurer’s website. Many insurance providers are saying they do not need you to contact them to tell them you are working from home, but some may want you to confirm this.

You do not need to take out additional insurance against loss or damage of WG-owned ICT or other equipment (e.g. laptops, chairs) provided to support home-working. However, WG will not cover the cost of loss/damage of any personally-owned equipment you may also be using. This includes items purchased by you, but subsequently reimbursed by WG, such as a monitor.

**2.21 Will WG make tax payments while I’m working from home?**

Welsh Government will not be making additional payments for homeworking.

Individuals may wish to claim tax relief for the additional costs arising from having to work from home on a regular basis. Regular is defined by HMRC as frequent or following a pattern. You cannot claim tax relief if you choose to work from home. The Welsh Government will be making clear to HMRC what the position is for staff on working from home and that it is not a decision for the individual.

You can only claim for costs relating to your work, for example, business telephone calls or the extra cost of gas and electricity for your work area. You cannot claim for things that you use for both private and business use, for example, rent or broadband access.

You can only claim if you have paid tax in the year. Tax relief will be based on the rate at which you pay tax. Collecting or apportioning any additional costs arising from working from home could prove difficult and, therefore, HMRC has agreed individuals can claim tax relief of £6 per week regardless of the actual costs incurred.

HMRC has confirmed that no evidence will be required to support claims based on £6 per week. Any claims in excess of £6 per week will need to be evidenced.

Claims must be retrospective. Claims can be made on an ongoing basis during the year or once at the end of the year. It is unlikely that HMRC will directly reimburse costs incurred. It is far more likely that HMRC will adjust an individual’s tax code for the year to come.

Claims can be actioned using the HMRC self-assessment form or the HMRC ‘claim income tax relief for your employment expenses (P87)’ form.

There are a number of different ways to claim tax relief depending on your circumstances.

**Claim online**

To claim these expenses, you will need a Government Gateway user ID and password. You can create a user ID if you do not already have one. Creating a Government Gateway ID usually takes about 10 minutes. It works best if you have:

* your National Insurance number
* a recent payslip or P60 or a valid UK passport

[Claim using the online service](https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/digital-forms/form/tax-relief-for-expenses-of-employment/draft/guide) (registration required).

**Claim by post**

A hard copy claim form is available but you must use this form if you’re claiming either:

* on behalf of someone else
* relief for more than 5 different jobs

You’ll need to fill in [the print and post form on-screen](https://public-online.hmrc.gov.uk/lc/content/xfaforms/profiles/forms.html?contentRoot=repository:///Applications/PersonalTax_A/1.0/P87_20189&template=P87.xdp) and send it to HMRC. The return address is on the form.

**Claim by phone**

You can claim by [phone](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/contact/income-tax-enquiries-for-individuals-pensioners-and-employees) if you have already claimed expenses in a previous year and your total expenses are less than either:

* £1,000
* £2,500 for professional fees and subscriptions

**2.22 What can I do to work from home smarter?**

We’ve produced a really handy guide to working from home that you can access [here](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29355542/document/versions/published).

If you haven’t already done so, please

* [Set up call forwarding from your desk phone to an alternative number.](https://welshgov-myit.onbmc.com/dwp/app/#/knowledge/KBA00001691/rkm)
* Read the ‘[Effective Working from Home Handbook](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29355542/document/versions/published)’ and the [Virtual Meeting Guide.](https://welshgov-myit.onbmc.com/dwp/app/#/knowledge/KBA00002001/rkm)
* Consider whether you require any other equipment to enable you to work from home safely. There is further information below on how to get additional equipment and how whether you can be reimbursed.
* you know how to spot scams/phishing emails (there are quite a few circulating about COVID-19).  Cyber Safe Wales have produced an [online tutorial about phishing](https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/search?query=phishing&strict=false&popupUri=%2FResource%2Fc9673a28-21a5-44de-868d-53022d26c3b7) which you can access via the WG Learning Lab. Or watch this short video from the [National Cyber Security Centre](https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/training/top-tips-for-staff-web/story_html5.html) on how to spot a phishing scam.

If you need further information on how to connect to the Welsh Government network from home, please call the ICT Service Desk.

**2.23 Can I go to the office to collect my equipment to use at home?**

If you have equipment that you did not manage to take home with you i.e. standard office chair or an already assigned specialist chair, keyboard, mouse, mouse mat, lap top riser, headset, specialist chair or footrest and is ***essential*** for you to be able to work effectively at home it may be possible to collect these items from your **nearest office** under the following arrangements:

* You must be able to collect and transport the equipment yourself.
* You **must** also be able to return and transport the equipment yourself if it is necessary to do so once office working is restored.
* You should only travel to the office if it is essential that you need the equipment to be able to work at home.
* You should **only** travel to the office if you are well enough to do so. You must **not**go to the office if you have any symptoms or if a member of your household has symptoms.
* You will need your building security pass in order to gain access to the office and remove items. Please remember your pass as temporary passes will not be issued on the day.
* You will need to complete the ‘[Request Office Equipment for Home form](https://welshgov-myit.onbmc.com/dwp/app/#/itemprofile/13303)’ which can also be found on MyIT under the Remote Services section. Your local facilities manager will then contact you to arrange a date and time that you can call to collect your equipment.

**If you are collecting an office chair** you need to read the [Furniture and Equipment for Home Use guidance](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA30364170/document/versions/published) which contains important details of your responsibilities and information regarding the size and weight of chairs and suggested two person handling.

You must be able to visit the respective office on the time / day which Facilities advise; access will not be allowed at any other time.

We are managing the movement of people around our offices for health and safety reasons so stocks of equipment will be made available and you will not be permitted to visit other parts of the building such as your desk at the current time. You must have your building security pass with you to access the building and pick up any equipment.

Any equipment that is moved will be taken at your own risk. You will need to make sure that you have a suitable vehicle and consider manual handling guidelines.

Please note that **monitors** are attached to arms and don’t come with a stand so these unfortunately cannot be removed.

If you have:

* An underlying condition that hasn’t to date merited a specialist chair but which is being exacerbated by homeworking
* An underlying condition for which the freedom chair has been recommended by Workplace Adjustment Team (WAT)
* Are developing a musculoskeletal disorders as a result of working from home and generic advice on breaks isn’t improving your condition

You should complete an online DSE assessment and if advised by Workplace Adjustments Team (WAT) that a chair is needed, you should arrange to pick up the chair from your local office in liaison with the local facilities team.

Any items taken home must be returned when you are back in the office, though headsets can be taken back and forth as needed.

If you are working at home and have any concerns about:

* reasonable adjustments, please contact the **Workplace Adjustments Team** for advice;
* ICT software or adjustments, please contact the ICT Service desk for advice;
* furniture or other standard equipment, please contact the Facilities Helpdesk for advice.

**2.24 I need a monitor and other equipment to work from home, can I buy and reclaim?**

Due to the high level of requests for additional kit to assist home working, we are currently unable to process any new or outstanding requests for equipment made via the ICT catalogue nor would we be able to provide monitors or printers. Connecting your laptops to a personal printer breaches ICT Security Policy and is not allowed. On that basis, personal printer consumables will not be reimbursed as they should not be used for work related activity.

In exceptional circumstances where you cannot reasonably work without the following equipment, your line manager can authorise you to purchase and be reimbursed for the following if needed and within the limits (inc VAT):

* Mouse and Keyboard set (up to £25)
* Monitor (up to £150)
* Laptop Riser (up to £20)
* Headset (up to £20) – if not available via MyIT[[1]](#footnote-2)

Under the transitional working arrangements, a ‘print and collect’ service is now available from the Aberystwyth, Cardiff, Merthyr and Llandudno Junction offices. An additional ‘print and post’ service is also being trialled via the Copy Unit in the Cardiff office. Please see the separate guidance on [Office Printing Arrangements](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA30902525/document/versions/published) for details of both options.

For many people, the laptop and headsets will be sufficient to work effectively at home and you can make adjustments to make your work space more comfortable.  There are some steps that you can take to make life easier:

You can connect your laptop to your TV or home monitor if you need a larger screen. If you are unable to use an alternative screen in your home you will need to speak to your line manager to discuss your specific needs.

You are able to plug in a personal keyboard and mouse (including Bluetooth). Other personal items must still not be connected in line with our Security Policy. If you use some household items such as a box or some books to raise your laptop you can create a user experience more like the office, otherwise you can purchase a laptop riser.

If you are in a quiet room at home you do not need a headset to use Skype or MS Teams.  Alternatively you can use a personal set of headphones (not Bluetooth) for example, those that came with your mobile phone as they have a microphone built in.

Where the WAT team advise, following a DSE assessment, that other office equipment is needed in order to work from home, Welsh Government may exceptionally reimburse for reasonable costs towards the equipment

These can be claimed via e-payments via own budget, but only with a valid receipt. Costs will then be met centrally once we have worked through the details of how recharging costs will work in practice. Additional guidance on how to use e-payments can be found [here](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29918299/document/versions/published).

If you purchase ICT equipment and claim the costs back, it is our expectation that these will be retained by you for future smart working from home. Welsh Government will not reimburse for each item of equipment (monitor, mouse, keyboard, laptop riser, headset) within 3 years of first claim.

The purchase of ICT and other office equipment for the home may have tax implications. The equipment you purchase and are subsequently reimbursed for should not be for private use. The provision of equipment should be based on your duties and the need for you to have the equipment to undertake these duties.

**2.25 Can I order a desk for home use?**

We want you to have a safe and comfortable home environment to work in and ExCo have listened to your feedback and agreed that desks will be available for you to order **from Monday 21 September** if you need one. Before ordering a desk, please read the [Homeworking Desks guidance](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA31391931/document/versions/published) and ensure the option you need will fit the space you have available in your home and that you are familiar with the package size, weight, delivery and assembly instructions etc.

From 21 September you will be able to request a desk for homeworking via MyIT by completing the ‘Request Office Desk for Home’ form in the Remote Services Section.

Desks will be provided in flat-pack format for assembly at home. A limited number of flat-packed desks will also be made available from a number of our offices if you would prefer to collect one. Please make sure your vehicle is big enough to accommodate the package before selecting this option. If calling to your local office would mean travelling in or out of an area that is under travel restrictions due to a local lockdown related to COVID-19 then you will need to select the delivery option.

**2.26 How do I get stationery items or be reimbursed for them?**

If you are based at one of the four open offices, you may attend your office to pick up stationery (pens, notebooks or other small items) from your team or Division’s stocks where you are unable to replenish from any personal provision. Please follow the [Ad-hoc Attendance](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA31065540/document/versions/published) guidance for details of the process to follow for your office. Please don’t attend the office without approval in advance or you may be turned away.

If your ‘home office’ or other local office is not open or you are unable to collect items yourself for any reason, you can obtain prior approval from your Line Manager to purchase stationery items. Receipts must be provided and you will be reimbursed via e-payments using your divisional cost codes. To reduce the administrative burden of processing claims, no claim under £5 will be paid.

In order to get the most from your office visits, you should where possible aim to collect stationery when visiting an office for another reason, e.g. collecting printing or on days where it has been agreed that you will work out of an office.

**2.27 Where is the IT kit I ordered for my new starter?**

All new users will be issued with a laptop but the build cannot take place until all New Starter arrangements have been completed. Before contacting ICT can you please check that you have completed the following:

* Submitted a New User Account for the user via MyIT
* Completed the Laptop request for the user via MyIT

Until confirmation is received from Shared Service Centre (SSC) that a New User Account has been approved and created ICT are unable to action the laptop build. To progress a New User Account please speak with your HR Business Partner or SSC.

The commencement of the laptop build process is completely dependent on the approval of the New User account from HR. Once approval has been received we will commence the laptop but may not be able to provide an estimated date for completion as this is dependent on the numbers already being built

**2.28 I have no connectivity at home. What can I do?**

If you already pay for broadband at home then no additional expenses can be claimed without creating a potential tax liability. If your broadband is capped and you’re unable to remove that cap for free, WG will reimburse the differential.

If a broadband internet connection is needed to work from home and is not already available, then the broadband fee can be reimbursed by WG and is non-taxable.

If you wish to purchase your own external wifi dongle then you are allowed to do so, but they must not be of the type which connect via USB. Welsh Government will not reimburse any costs associated with purchase of such dongles.

Official telephone calls and extra data charges can be claimed back by annotating bills with the additional costs highlighted, in line with T&S policies. For more information please refer to the [Staff Reimbursements](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Money/SitePages/Staff-Reimbursements.aspx) page on the intranet.

**Welsh Government will only reimburse the costs until you are once again able to work from a WG office. The funding for this will cease when your office re-opens and you will become solely responsible for any ongoing costs, so please bear this in mind before committing to any additional expenditure.**

Please note the agreement to funding is given at a departmental level with the approval of your line manager following a discussion around the need and reimbursement will be made with evidence of extra costs via e-payments.

**2.29 Receiving Work Phone Calls**

Did you know you can forward your office phone?  You can do this by following the guidance contained within the [MyIT – Call Forwarding Guide](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29355542/document/versions/published).

**2.30 I need IT support, how can I get help?**

You should try [MyIT](https://welshgov-myit.onbmc.com/) in the first instance or alternatively call the ICT Service Desk on 0300 025 5555. They are open from 7am through to 7pm Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays.

## **Section 3 – Caring Responsibilities and Wellbeing**

**3.1 I have caring responsibilities for someone or live with someone who has or who is displaying symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19). What should I do?**

Please follow the latest [WG Guidance on Self-Isolation for Households with Possible Coronavirus](https://gov.wales/self-isolation-stay-home-guidance-households-possible-coronavirus).

If you have symptoms, you should stay as far away from other members of your household as possible. It is especially important to stay away from anyone who is at risk or clinically vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus (shielding) with whom you share a household.

Reduce the spread of infection in your home by washing your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser, and cover coughs and sneezes.

**3.2 What should employees do if they live with someone who is clinically more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19?**

As a result of lower infection rates, shielding of those who are clinically more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 came to an end in Wales on 16th August 2020 and those who have previously followed shielding advice can now follow the [same **rules** as the rest of the population.](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance) The Chief Medical Officer for Wales [has written out to individuals on the Shielding Patient List](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/inline-documents/2020-07/Letter.pdf) to provide the latest coronavirus advice. However, employees who are living with or caring for someone who is clinically more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 may wish to continue to work from home and where possible, line managers should support this.

**3.3 I do not want my child / children to return to school in the autumn so will be home schooling them instead. This means I will be unable to work. What options are available to me?**

The expectation is that children will take up school or care places where these are available. If you choose to keep your child at home and cannot work as a consequence, your options include taking annual or flexi leave, unpaid special leave or a career break. You should discuss your personal situation and the concerns you have about sending your child back to school with your line manager. You and your manager should agree the most appropriate approach to cover your absence from work. Managers are expected to be fair and consistent when considering employees’ personal circumstances.

If your child does not return to school, it is the Welsh Government’s view that it would not be appropriate for your local authority or school to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) or commence proceedings against you for non-attendance. Welsh Government will monitor the situation over the first half-term before reviewing its position.

**3.4 What happens if my child’s school/class or other care setting closes temporarily as a result of local/national containment action due to coronavirus?**

We expect employees to consider alternative care arrangements where possible, though this may depend on whether your child is required to self-isolate as a result of the class/school/care setting closure.

If you have no alternative care arrangements, but your role can be done from home and you are able adapt your working pattern to care for your children or dependants, your line manager should support you in this.

Speak to your manager about the type of activities you can undertake during the closure period and agree with them a daily plan of work you can achieve, your availability and likely hours to be worked. Your health and wellbeing remains a critical factor when agreeing and reviewing working arrangements, so it will be important for your manager to ensure you are not required to work unreasonably late/long hours. However, if it is in your interests to work some hours outside of the flexi bandwidths (6am until 8pm), we would expect a pragmatic approach to be agreed.

Your manager should be guided by what you feel you are able to do, recognising that your circumstances may change over time. Where a full day is not achievable and you have no flexi credit, you should credit (top up) your flexi sheets to your full contracted working day at the end of the 4 week reporting period. Your manager can also grant paid special leave for any periods where you are unable to work during the temporary school closure as a result of caring requirements.

You and your manager need to work together, be reasonable, stay in touch, keep arrangements under review and monitor wellbeing. You should also keep abreast of any changes to [Welsh Government advice and guidance](https://gov.wales/education-coronavirus) which may impact on your circumstances.

**3.5 My child’s school/class or other care setting has closed temporarily as a result of coronavirus containment action. I am unable to work during the closure as my child needs constant supervision and there is no alternative childcare available to me. What are my options?**

Your manager should be guided by what you feel you are able to do, recognising that your circumstances may change over time. If it has not been possible to identify ways of balancing work and childcare so that essential work can still be delivered, your manager may grant special leave with pay for the period of the closure. The usual limits of special leave will not apply and each case will be considered sensitively and on its own merits. You are expected to act responsibly, and if you had already booked annual leave or flexi leave during the closure period, you must not cancel this leave and apply for special leave instead.

You and your manager need to work together, be reasonable, stay in touch, keep arrangements under review and monitor wellbeing. You should also keep abreast of any changes to [Welsh Government advice and guidance](https://gov.wales/education-coronavirus) which may impact on your circumstances.

**3.6 My child’s school/class or other care setting has closed temporarily as a result of coronavirus containment action. I need to work from home during the closure but my role cannot be done remotely. What are my options?**

We expect employees to consider alternative care arrangements where possible, though this may depend on whether your child is required to self-isolate as a result of the class/school/care setting closure.

Your manager should look at how they can move work around the team to enable you to work from home during this period. If, however, this is not possible or none of your work can be done remotely, your manager can consider temporarily redeploying you to other business critical work, where working from home is feasible for a short period of time.

If alternative work is not available, your manager may grant special leave with pay for the period of the closure. You are expected to act responsibly, and if you had already booked annual leave or flexi leave during the closure period, you must not cancel this leave and apply for special leave instead.

You and your manager need to work together, be reasonable, stay in touch, keep arrangements under review and monitor wellbeing. You should also keep abreast of any changes to [Welsh Government advice and guidance](https://gov.wales/education-coronavirus) which may impact on your circumstances.

**3.7 What happens if my child has symptoms that may indicate a coronavirus infection and is self-isolating e.g. while awaiting test results?**

If your child has symptoms such as a new continuous cough, fever or loss of taste/smell, they will not be able to attend school or their usual care setting until either they have tested negative or they have completed the usual self-isolation period and are feeling better. If you are fit for work, your role can be done from home and you are able adapt your working pattern to care for your child, your line manager should support you in this, applying an appropriate flexi-credit if a full day is not achievable. If it’s not possible to identify ways of balancing work and childcare, your manager may grant special leave with pay during the isolation period. You are expected to act responsibly, and if you had already booked annual leave or flexi leave at this time, you must not cancel this leave and apply for special leave instead.

**3.8 My child cannot attend wrap-around childcare (e.g. breakfast club or after school club) due to coronavirus restrictions and I will struggle to start/finish work at my normal time. What should I do?**

You should discuss your situation with your line manager. The flexi bandwidth now allows hours to be worked at any time between 6am and 8pm on weekdays we expect your line manager to be sympathetic to the situation and allow you to vary your usual start/finish times, making up any shortfall in hours at other times.

**3.9 I am returning from parental leave and cannot find enough child-care to support a full-time working pattern. What are my options?**

We offer a number of family-friendly working options to help you to balance work and caring commitments. Please see the [Working Flexibly](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Working-Flexibly-Working-Hours-Work-Patterns.aspx) intranet page for more information.

**Wellbeing**

**3.10 How do I stay physically fit working from home?**

Follow the advice in the [Effective Working from Home - Your guide to working in isolation](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29355542/document/versions/published) handbook on working conditions – e.g. lighting, seating, posture and taking regular breaks. Ensure that you are not working excessive hours and take regular breaks from your screen to protect your eyes. Use the 20/20/20 rule: look away from your screen every 20 minutes, at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

Take a look at this [Staying Active](https://gov.wales/safe-help/staying-active) advice and tips on the Welsh Government website and try these [Desk stretches.](https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/desk-stretches) You can also get active at the Welsh Government [virtual gym.](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Local-News/SitePages/Get-exercising-at-the-Welsh-Government-virtual-gym.aspx)

Remember to use your [Wellbeing Hour](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA20891726/document/versions/published). Try to do something which takes you away from a screen and enables you to have some fresh air and move around. This can be used for your outdoor exercise (in accordance with the [social distancing guidance](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-social-distancing-guidance) or for exercising, yoga or mindfulness within the home. Alternatively, try some of these [10 free fitness apps](https://brightside.me/inspiration-health/ten-awesome-free-apps-for-working-out-at-home-143455/) for working out at home.

The DSE Assessment [Healthy Working](https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/search?query=healthy%20working&strict=false&popupUri=%2FResource%2F8e594506-4b08-4d4e-814f-ca90d1e82364) includes a home working module and it may be a good idea to familiarise yourself with this as soon as possible:

Cardinus have set up a new [Health and Safety Hub](https://www.cardinus.com/covid-19-health-safety-hub/#HOMEWORKING) on safe working when you are homeworking temporarily.

**3.11 How do I look after my own and my dependants’ mental health?**

**Keep in touch** with family, friends and colleagues remotely – whether by phone, Skype, FaceTime, email etc. A virtual lunch or coffee break is conducive to good mental health.

**Take time out for yourself.** If you are going to be in your home for an extended period, it is important you plan breaks in your working day and organise activities you’re interested in at night. It might be the chance to work through your personal to-do list or take up a new hobby.

It is important during this time that you continue to book and use annual leave as you would normally to avoid burnout. Discuss with your manager about how this will work in your team.

Spend time doing things that you enjoy – this might include reading, [cooking](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/), or listening to/watching favourite [radio](https://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts) or TV programmes.

The following websites have a wealth of resources on mental health help:

* [**Charity for Civil Servants**](https://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/) offer a range of facilities support and free prize draws! – well worth a look!
* Welsh Government’s [Stress and Mental Wellbeing](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Stress-and-Mental-Wellbeing.aspx) intranet pages
* Contact Mind Matters. They have a wealth of resources and advice. Sign up to their mailing list at mindmatters@gov.wales and visit their intranet page [here](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-About-Us/SitePages/Mind-Matters.aspx)
* Access our [**EAP**](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/You-and-Your-Wellbeing.aspx)
* [**The Samaritans**](https://www.samaritans.org/wales/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/) have information on their website: and their 24/7 helpline is **116 123.**
* [**Mind**](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/)  Helpline number is **0300 123 3393**
* [**Childline**](https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/message-from-childline/)Counsellors are available via the online chat on the website. Their helpline number is **0800 1111**.
* [**AnxietyUK**](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/) have resources on their website and a helpline open 10:00 – 20:00 - **03444 775775**
* Civil Service Local has developed a handy [A-Z to Better Wellbeing toolkit](https://civilservicelocal.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/94/2018/11/A-Z-to-Better-Wellbeing-toolkit.pdf)

Visit the [**Learning lab**](https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/workspaces) to watch some TED talks and see our health and wellbeing courses. You can find a regularly updated selection of Sites and Resources to Support Wellbeing during Covid-19 as well as other useful resources linked under Mind Matters. Courses include resilience and wellbeing, stress, mindfulness, mental health at work and mental wellbeing.

**3.12 What if I have domestic issues that make it difficult to work from home?**

For those experiencing domestic abuse, measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 such as self-isolating and mandatory lock downs could trap you in your home, isolated from the people and the resources that could help you. It may be necessary for you to work from home over a long period of time. You may also have children who are at home from school who need to be protected.

The Welsh Government is fully aware of the implications of the current situation for you, as well as the continued need for unobtrusive contact and confidentiality when you access support.

When you are working from home, you may wish to call, email or text your line manager, [Case Advisory Team](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/HR-Case-Advisory-team.aspx), HR Business Partner or TUS for support options including special leave. The Employee Assistance Programme is available to all employees. Please call 0800 174 319 or [www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk](http://www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk). (Username – welsh, Password – government)

**3.13 Where can I turn if I am the victim of domestic abuse?**

The Welsh Government’s Live Fear Free helpline is available on **0808 80 10 800**; Text service: 078600 77333; or [www.gov.wales/live-fear-free](http://www.gov.wales/live-fear-free), and provides easy to access, helpful confidential advice on a variety of matters which may be relevant to your situation. It is open 24/7.

**If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police - the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.**

**If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and then press 55. This will transfer your call to the relevant police force who will assist you without you having to speak.**

The UK Government’s advice is that you are able to leave your home if you are in danger from domestic abuse and looking for refuge. The UK Government advice and organisations that can help can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse)

Specific advice in relation to coronavirus has also been issued by [Women’s Aid](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/).

**3.14 Where can I find support and information for older people?**

* [Older Peoples' Commissioner](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/coronavirus.aspx)
* [Age UK](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/information-advice/health-wellbeing/coronavirus/) They also offer a ‘[check in and chat service](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/information-advice/age-cymru-advice/check-in-and-chat/)’ for people over 70.
* [The Silver Line](https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/) is the only free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Telephone 0800 4 70 80 90.

**3.15 Where can I find support and information on coronavirus for carers?**

Carers should follow the latest Welsh Government [shielding guidance](https://gov.wales/guidance-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-medical-grounds-extremely-vulnerable-coronavirus-0). As of 16 August 2020, those who have previously had to shield no longer need to do so, but if shielding is required in future, there is support and information available, including food boxes for those who can’t get help from family, friends or voluntary groups.

If you have any questions about what help is available in your area, please contact your local authority.

The following websites may also offer support:

[Carers UK](https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19)

[Carers Trust](https://carers.org/guidance-on-coronavirus/-guidance-coronavirus)

**3.16 Where can I find support and information on coronavirus for disabled people?**

[Disability Wales](http://www.disabilitywales.org/coronavirus-questions-answered/)

[Learning Disability Wales](https://www.ldw.org.uk/project/coronavirus/)

**3.17 How can I keep my children occupied if they have to stay at home as a result of coronavirus?**

In addition to work being provided by your school, there are plenty of ways to keep your children busy.

There is a new network in the [Learning Lab](https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/workspaces) to share resources for children’s learning and family activities while we’re asked to stay at home.

You can leave home without actually leaving the couch, from virtual zoo exhibits to museum gallery tours [here](https://www.insider.com/museums-theme-parks-offer-virtual-tours-ideal-for-social-distancing-2020-3) and [here](https://www.msn.com/en-us/travel/travel-trivia/stuck-at-home-these-12-famous-museums-offer-virtual-tours-you-can-take-on-your-couch-video/ar-BB119nm6).

Take a look at the activities and resources at the [BBC](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize), [National Geographic](https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/) and [Futurelearn](https://www.futurelearn.com/). Or start learning a new language with [Duolingo](https://www.duolingo.com/).

**3.18 How do I talk to my children about COVID19?**

Take a look at the resources below if you want advice on talking to your children about COVID19:

[BBC](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51734855)

[British Psychological Society](https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/advice-talking-children-about-illness)

[PHW Easy Read Information on COVID19](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-resources/easy-read-resources/)

**Financial Wellbeing**

**3.19 Where can I find help on rent/mortgage payments and housing?**

Welsh Government [Guidance for tenants in the private rented sector](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-tenants-in-the-private-rented-sector-html). Tenants are currently entitled to at least [three months’ notice](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-tenants-in-the-private-rented-sector-html#section-39094) if their landlord wishes to evict them.

Answers to some frequently asked questions are on the [UK Finance](https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/press/press-releases/uk-finance-responds-statement-chancellor-regarding-support-mortgage-customers) website.

[FCA Mortgage Coronavirus Info for consumers](https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/mortgages-coronavirus-consumers)

Welsh Government [Help to buy loan interest repayment holiday](https://gov.wales/housing-minister-confirms-help-buy-wales-loan-interest-repayment-holiday)

Shelter Cymru [Coronavirus advice](https://sheltercymru.org.uk/get-advice/coronavirus/) and can provide housing related advice by phone on **08000 495 495**.

**3.20 What if I/family members have financial worries?**

If a member of your household or family is self-employed and has lost income due to the coronavirus they should visit the UK Gov page for details of the support available, which could include:

* A grant under the [self-employed income support scheme](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme)
* [Deferral of Self-Assessment income tax payments due in July 2020](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/defer-your-self-assessment-payment-on-account-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19)
* increased amounts of [Universal Credit](https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit)
* [Business Interruption Loan Scheme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses#support-for-businesses-through-the-coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme)

If they are a director of their own company and paid through PAYE they may be able to get support [using the Job Retention Scheme](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-could-be-covered-by-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme). Welsh Government is also providing financial support through Business Wales – visit:

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice> for further information.

Visit the **Charity for Civil Servants** <https://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/>

The following organisations also offer financial advice and resources:

* [Citizen Advice](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/)
* [Money and Pensions Service - Coronavirus Financial Advice](https://mailchi.mp/maps.org.uk/news-from-the-money-and-pensions-service-january-2824249?e=ce548efa9d)
* You can also contact [Money Advice Services](https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/search?query=whatsapp) to receive free independent advice using live chat, WhatsApp or by phone.
* [National Debt Line](https://www.nationaldebtline.org/)
* [Step Change](https://www.stepchange.org/)
* [Money Saving Expert](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/)

**3.21 How can I protect myself / others from fake news and scams?**

Fake news is not new, but as concern about the coronavirus (COVID-19) mounts, falsified reports have flooded social media. The UK Government’s SHARE checklist will help you to spot fake news:

* Source - make sure information comes from a trusted source
* Headline - always read beyond the headline
* Analyse - check the facts
* Retouched - does the image or video look as though it has been doctored?
* Error - look out for bad grammar and spelling

There are a number of scams circulating through various media including ransomware, credential theft, bitcoin or fraud. Some are online shopping scams where products never arrive or a fake link to information contains malware which steals information from infected devices. There have also been reports of doorstep crime and telephone scams.

If you spot any fake news or scams you can report them to the platform you found the post on or [Action Fraud](https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/) / 0300 123 2040.

Further information on types of scams and what to look out for can be found in our [Security Bulletin Special Issue](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29591331/document/versions/published).

**3.22 Where can I find local information?**

Here is a list of [Local Authorities](https://www.wlga.wales/welsh-local-authority-links)

## **Section 4 – Worktime and Leave – Special/Annual/Flexi and Volunteering**

**4.1 What if an employee has to take special leave because of temporary school closures?**

In the event of the closure of a school/class or other care setting due to local coronavirus containment action, line managers should be fully supportive of affected employees, considering flexible working arrangements, including working from home or adapting working patterns to care for children. If an employee cannot adapt their working pattern to care for their children due to the closure and is required to take time off as a result, paid special leave should be applied for the duration of the temporary closure.

**4.2** **I’m working longer hours and I may struggle to take my annual leave. What can I do?**

The temporary COVID-19 working arrangements set out in the [Overtime Policy](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA654141/document/versions/published) apply to **all** staff – whether part-time or full-time. This means that over a 4-week flexi period, part-time staff will need to have worked the same number of hours as full-time staff in order to start claiming hours as overtime. The ‘threshold’ for claims (for both F/T and P/T staff) is **185 hours** i.e. standard conditioned hours over the 4 week period (148 hours) plus 37 additional ‘flexi’ hours (= 185 hours).

* Any overtime payable is calculated at the end of each 4 week flexi accounting period;
* Additional hours worked over and above conditioned hours (whatever the working pattern) should be logged as usual on the flexi-sheet;
* At the end of each 4-week accounting period, staff who have accumulated more than 185 hours will be able to claim those additional hours as paid overtime;
* Claims should be made via the [standard overtime claim form](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Allowances-Overtime-and-Traveltime.aspx) at the end of each 4-week accounting period;
* The claim form should state that the overtime claim relates to COVID-19.
* Anyone claiming overtime will begin the next accounting period with 37 hours flexi-credit.

There is an exception to the ‘threshold’ in relation to hours worked at weekends and on public/privilege holidays which both attract an overtime payment premium (i.e. double-time for Sundays and public/privilege days; time-and-a-half for Saturday working).

Staff who are asked to work at weekends or on public/privilege holidays as a result of COVID-19 (note this does need to be at management request and not of their own choosing), **do not** need to have reached the ‘threshold’ set out above in order to submit a premium payment claim. We are therefore advising staff who need to submit such claims to do so separately.

Anyone claiming an overtime payment **cannot** at the same time record these hours on their flexi-sheet as this would effectively be double-counting the hours worked.

**To note:**

As the overtime is as a result of COVID-19, claims can only be made for the 4 week periods from March 9th. Any credit or debit accumulated prior to 9th March should be frozen for time being. Those with a deficit going into March 9th will of course have the opportunity to offset that against any credit since then **if they wish**. They may, however be in a position where they are working sufficient hours to claim overtime during this period. Guidance on completing the form is available here:

[https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id:A29924318/document/versions/published](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29924318/document/versions/published)

**Overtime is not currently payable to members of the Senior Civil Service.** However UK Civil Service are looking at this arrangement and will update in due course.

**Overtime for employees (outside the SCS)**

Where you accumulate more than 37 hours flexi in a 4 week reporting period, you may claim the excess as overtime. This temporary amendment is to take account of the variable work patterns some employees undertake week on week to manage work and caring responsibilities. Overtime and flexi cannot be claimed for the same period. You also qualify for any premium payments, related to the requirement to work at weekends or on public or privilege holidays.

Full guidance on Overtime can be found [here](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Allowances-Overtime-and-Traveltime.aspx)

**4.3 Will we be allowed to carry over additional Annual or Flexi Leave where I’ve not been able to take it because of COVID-19?**

Line managers can ask you to cancel or postpone annual leave (or flexi leave) if it is necessary to deliver business. However, they must give the appropriate notice, for example, one week’s notice for one week’s leave (annual leave only). Line managers may also agree to employees carrying over or being paid for leave you were unable to take by the end of their leave year**.**

Welsh Government will allow full time staff to carry over 24 days and/or bank 10 days (pro-rated for part time staff). Those with banked leave have an additional year in which to take that leave. In exceptional circumstances where this is not suitable, payment for excess leave may be made following an approved business case to the HR Director.

**4.4 Should I be taking annual leave at this time?**

It’s important to feel able to take annual leave at this time, even if you are unable to go on holiday, as it is the main way that you can step away from the work, recharge your batteries and protect your wellbeing for the future.

Line managers are encouraged to allow requests for annual leave if possible, and act flexibly to resource remaining work.

**4.5 My employee has annual leave agreed but they are not able to go on their planned holiday due to COVID-19. Can they cancel their annual leave?**

Employees should be encouraged to take their annual leave to help make sure they take appropriate rest from work during the year.

You should allow employees to cancel annual leave if this supports business need, e.g. due to large number of employees not able to work.

Employees should be reminded that future annual leave requests will be handled in line with department's policies, e.g. business needs, requests from others, etc

**Volunteering**

**4.6 I’d like to volunteer to help others?**

Many of you have expressed an interest in volunteering to help your local communities with the coronavirus response. The most valuable contribution you can, and should be making, during this unprecedented time, is in your vital role of supporting citizens of our country, through delivering your work in the most effective way, and, wherever possible, doing this by working from home.

The primary focus for us all must be on the role we are currently doing in our department, for which we have skills and are most competent in doing.

Additionally, we may be needed and willing to move into other roles, directorates or departments where there may be a greater demand for our resources and skills, helping to deliver our ministerial priorities to the people of Wales.

 You can continue to volunteer for your communities outside working hours. A link to the policy can be found here:

[https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id:A8063392/document/versions/published](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA8063392/document/versions/published)

The exception is trained medical or emergency service staff. If they wish to be released to provide support during COVID-19 will need to discuss this with their manager. Employees should only be released beyond the existing 12 days special leave provision subject to the following conditions:

* they are not currently in a critical and essential departmental role
* if possible, there is an agreed date when the additional volunteering leave will end
* there is an arrangement in place to recall the employee to the department if they are needed.

Employees will be on paid special leave whilst serving in their roles. The usual limit of paid special leave will not apply in these exceptional circumstances and employees may now be granted up to full-time paid special leave to volunteer for medical and emergency services. The paid special leave will not count towards the employee’s cumulative limit for special leave, nor their special leave for other volunteering.

Managers should discuss with the employee how much paid special leave they will need. For example, the employee may be needed two days a week to carry out duties and will need two days a week paid special leave, or they may be needed for a month on a full-time basis.

If the employee is given time off on a full-time basis, the manager should agree with them how they will keep in touch during their absence from the department. It is important the employee is made aware that they must notify their manager if they take any time off, such as annual leave or sick absence, as these will need to be recorded in the normal way.

When the employee is no longer needed to provide support for duties, they should discuss with their manager their return to work. The manager should hold a return to work meeting with the employee to agree a date for their return and any support they may need to settle back into their role. The manager should also discuss the employee’s achievements, training and learning and explore how to make best use of their transferable skills in the workplace.

For those of you who wish to “serve twice” and volunteer to support the coronavirus crisis, existing paid special leave limits and volunteering guidance continue to apply; there is no change to these provisions.

Additionally, many of us are choosing to contribute through volunteering in our own time, and you may of course continue to do this.

However, all volunteering activities, whether through using departmental leave or in your own time should be done remotely, from home, wherever possible.

In the midst of this crisis, our health is paramount. In all instances, to protect ourselves and others, it is vital that we all observe the Chief Medical Officer’s advice on social distancing and self-isolation.

You can join a local volunteer organisation through your county voluntary council or sign up on [**Volunteering Wales**](https://volunteering-wales.net/vk/volunteers/index.htm)where you can search for opportunities such as a volunteer shopper, a delivery volunteer or befriending over the phone. Once you’ve registered your interest to become a volunteer you’ll be sent opportunities that match what you want to do. This website also gives important information on staying safe whilst volunteering.

You can also check for any local volunteering opportunities with your local authority. If you are not in an at risk group and you want to help (within the social distancing guidelines), please visit the Welsh Government [Looking Out for Each Other](https://gov.wales/safe-help) pages for ideas and advice.

[How to help your GP practice](https://gov.wales/simple-steps-help-your-gp-practice-help-you)

[How to help your pharmacy](https://gov.wales/simple-steps-help-your-pharmacy-help-you)

1. Please check MyIT for stock availability **before** purchasing your own headset. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)