

Already claiming benefits? Find out about COVID-19 changes

To help people affected by the coronavirus outbreak, the government has made changes to most benefits. There is information on gov.uk about all the changes here [<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-COVID-19-what-to-do-if-youre-already-getting-benefits>].

Below we have highlighted some key points:

You might see your payments increase

From 6 April, the standard allowance of Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits have been increased by £20 a week for the next 12 months. Local Housing Allowance rates have also been raised, this could mean that if you pay rent to a private landlord you receive more help towards these costs.

There are no face-to-face appointments

There are currently no assessments or interviews taking place for disability-related benefits such as ESA and PIP. Jobcentres are also not holding face-to-face meetings or appointments. You may still be expected to search for work and meet other requirements, but the DWP have said that no sanctions will be issued for missing appointments or work availability requirements if you are staying at home on Government advice and have informed them.

More help if you are self-employed

Normally if you are self-employed and claim Universal Credit, you must earn more than the minimum income floor for your benefit payment to be calculated on your actual earnings. Currently the minimum income floor is not being applied, this means that if your earnings are low you will likely receive higher Universal Credit payments than normal.

There is more flexibility if your circumstances change

To help make things simpler, HMRC will not be changing Tax Credit payments if your hours have temporarily dropped because of the coronavirus outbreak. This is also the case if you receive Carer's Allowance and cannot do as many hours as normal. If you have a new baby, Child Benefit can also still be claimed even if you have been unable to register the birth.

Note: If you have a permanent change in circumstances, such as a reduction in your hours or you are laid off, you need to inform the HMRC or DWP, otherwise you may be asked to repay an overpayment at a later date.

Your debt repayments might be paused

The DWP has stopped taking repayments from benefit payments for certain debts. Deductions for Housing Benefit and Tax Credit overpayments, as well as Social Fund loans, have all been paused until at least July, and third party deductions (such as for rent or council tax arrears) have been stopped for three months from the 3 April 2020.