

Keeping your prepayment meter topped-up

The energy industry has recognised that with many people self-isolating or in lockdown, energy needs are going to rise significantly - as much as 40% higher than usual for those at home and with children. What is important to recognise is that you do not need to go without during this time. Ofgem has mandated that energy suppliers must be equipped to help you no matter what your circumstances are - if you're at all worried about losing your supply of either gas or electricity the first step is to let your supplier know.

There are generally two types of prepayment meter: the old 'legacy' meter, and the newer Smart meter.

Help for legacy meters

The most important thing to remember is that you can use your emergency credit at this time; although you will have to pay some of it back, that is something that can be discussed later on with your supplier. A number of suppliers have extended this emergency credit to as much as £50, meaning you can stay on-supply for longer in an emergency. Try to keep yourself warm and fed as much as you can, as when socially isolating your health is more at risk. Ensuring your surroundings are comfortable is important to maintaining good mental health in particular.

Work out where the nearest place you can top up is. If your local newsagent or shop is closed, then you may need to find out what alternatives there are. Payzone has a search tool on their [website](#), while the [Post Office](#) also has a branch finding tool.

Guidance from the Government is to try to top up more than you usually would where possible - this gives you a buffer to work from if your situation changes. Some meters can accept up to £200 in a single top-up, but do be aware that there is a limit to how much a lot of older meters can load at a time.

If you are completely isolated with no means to top up manually, **contact your supplier**. Each of them has been told by the Government to ensure that nobody is struggling with their energy supply at this time. Although help varies across suppliers, many of them can post you a prepaid card that can be used to top up your meter. Others can direct local engineers to come and help - even if you're suffering from COVID-19 at your home, they will be prepared with PPE in advance to keep everyone safe.

Help for Smart meters

The great thing about Smart meters is that they can be remotely accessed, both by you and your supplier, without anyone needing to leave the home! If you're having problems with being able to afford to top up a smart prepayment meter, then it's definitely worth speaking to your supplier. They have the systems to be able to send funds to your meter at the push of a button, usually. While wait times may be high, do be persistent as suppliers definitely want to help at this time.

