

COVID-19 (coronavirus)

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) for managers, staff and Agency workers

The following questions and answers are intended to provide managers, staff and Agency workers with the latest information on the coronavirus outbreak and how sickness absence, flexible working and leave should be managed. **These questions and answers are continually subject to change.**

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COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

1. What is COVID-19 (coronavirus)?

COVID-19 is the disease caused by novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common across the world. These viruses can cause mild symptoms ranging from a fever, new continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, to more serious conditions such as pneumonia, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. COVID-19, which is a new strain of coronavirus, has an incubation period of between 2 to 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19 (coronavirus), it is unlikely that they have been infected.

2. Where can I find reliable up to date information about COVID-19 (coronavirus)?

You are encouraged to read the latest guidance on the Department of Health website www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus and the latest health information and advice on the Public Health Agency (PHA) website - www.publichealth.hscni.net.

3. What can I do to protect myself and others against the virus?

You should follow the Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance on social distancing – see [COVID-19 Information for the public](#)

Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce the social interaction between people. These measures will help reduce the transmission of COVID-19. With regards to the workplace, the Executive has agreed that:

- Anyone who can work from home must work from home;
- Employers must facilitate working from home where it is feasible;
- No employer should compel an employee to come to work if it is feasible to work from home;
- Every employer must take all reasonable steps to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of employees during the COVID-19 emergency, whether working from home or in the workplace;
- Every employer must have particular regard to the safety of employees in the workplace and must put into effect the guidance on social distancing issued by the Department for the Economy;
- Every employer has a legal duty to ensure, so far as it is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees.

You can also take simple steps to reduce the risk of catching or spreading coronavirus.

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or into the crook of your elbow (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash your hands afterwards

- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- consider using face coverings in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible e.g. on public transport or in some shops.

Currently, NICS staff who cannot work from home **must** stay away from the workplace if they are:

- over 70;
- are in either the vulnerable or extremely vulnerable people categories (see link below for details); or
- pregnant.

NICS staff in the categories above will continue to be paid until further notice. This position will be kept under review as government advice is updated.

See links below for details:

[COVID-19 advice for vulnerable people](#)

In addition, further guidance on safety in the workplace can be found on the HSENI website [here](#)

4. Should I wear a face covering when leaving home?

The Public Health Agency (PHA) has recommended that you should think about using face coverings in particular circumstances, for example, short periods in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible.

In practice, these circumstances will largely mean on public transport and in shops.

Face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms.

A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used as part of personal protective equipment by healthcare and other workers; these should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace such as health and care workers and those in industrial settings like those exposed to dust hazards.

Further information on wearing and making face coverings can be found [here](#);

5. Will a face covering stop me getting COVID-19?

The evidence suggests that face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms.

Crucially, do not get a false sense of security about the level of protection provided by wearing a face covering. It is essential that everyone continues to:

- Practice social distancing as much as humanly possible;

- Wash their hands thoroughly throughout the day; and
- 'Catch it, kill it, bin it' when they sneeze or cough.
- For most people any potential infection from coronavirus will not be because of their work.
- If you do not normally wear a face mask, or any other PPE for work, then you do not need to because of coronavirus.
- Face coverings do not need to be worn in the workplace but employers should support their workers if they choose to wear one. You can find more on face coverings in the GOV.UK guides on [Working safely during coronavirus](#).

The PHA continues to advise that the above bullet points are still the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

6. I have just returned to Northern Ireland from abroad. What should I do?

From Monday 8 June, new rules for entering or returning to the UK become law:

[Health protection coronavirus international travel regulations NI](#)

Full details and advice for returning travellers can be found here: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): travel advice](#)

7. My member of staff has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 (coronavirus) but has no symptoms of the virus. Their colleagues are concerned about them being in work. What should I do?

At the moment advice is that people should have particular regard to personal hygiene (frequent, thorough hand washing etc.) and should self-isolate for 14 days if they are living in the same house as someone who has the symptoms. This is because it can take 14 days for symptoms to appear. If they do not get symptoms while self-isolating they can stop self-isolating after 14 days.

If your member of staff is not required to self-isolate they should attend work if it is essential that they do so. You could reassure staff by consulting the PHA website www.publichealth.hscni.net.

All staff should be working from home where it is possible to do so.

8. My member of staff is ill but they say it doesn't feel like flu. Their nose is running like a cold but no high temperature, new, continuous cough or loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste. What should I do?

You should advise them to check the online guidance provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) www.publichealth.hscni.net. If their symptoms do not match those of COVID-19 (coronavirus) and they are fit to attend work they should continue to work from home if possible or in the office if it is essential for them to do so. They are not required take sickness absence unless they are too unwell to work. They should also observe the good personal hygiene

practices (frequent, thorough hand washing etc.). If they develop symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), a high temperature and / or a new, continuous cough, or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, they must remain at home and record as a period of sickness on HRConnect, under chest and respiratory problems, COVID-19 (coronavirus).

9. What do I do if I start feeling ill in the workplace with COVID - 19 (coronavirus) symptoms?

If you are required to come into work to perform an **essential** role as determined by your Department and become unwell with a new, continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, you should immediately tell your manager you are unwell and you will be sent home to commence a period of sickness absence until you are fit to return to work. Remember you are required to self-isolate for a period of 7 days after you become ill with a symptom of COVID-19 so you may not return to the workplace within this period.

You should consult the PHA website www.publichealth.hscni.net for guidance immediately.

You do not need to seek medical advice before self-isolating. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a colleague has helped you when you were taken unwell with a new, continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

- If you need to wait for medical assistance, you may be moved to an area which is at least two metres away from other people. If possible your manager may find a room or area where you can be isolated behind a closed door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window for ventilation.
- You should remain at least two metres from other people. You should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and to cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag or pocket then throw the tissue in the bin. If you don't have any tissues available, you should cough and sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- If you need to go to the bathroom while waiting for medical assistance, you should use a separate bathroom if available.

10. What do I do if a member of staff or the public with suspected COVID-19 (coronavirus) has recently been to the work place?

If a member of staff has helped someone or been close to someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep up to date with the online guidance provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net.

Employees and customers should be reminded to wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds more frequently than normal.

Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.

11. What do I do if I am working at home and I start feeling ill with COVID-19 (coronavirus) symptoms?

If you become unwell with a new, continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, you should advise your manager that you are unwell. You will commence a period of sickness absence that will continue until you are fit to resume your work duties. Remember you are required to self-isolate for a period of 7 days after you become ill with a symptom of COVID-19 so you may not return to the workplace within this period. Where you are continuing to work from home you may commence work within the 7 day period if you are fit to do so.

Your period of absence will not impact on sickness review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of your sickness absence relating to COVID-19, you are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

Normal contact arrangements apply and you should keep in touch with your manager about your absence.

Do not visit your GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or if your condition gets worse, or you do not get better after 7 days, or if you have underlying medical conditions; then you are advised to telephone your GP or in a medical emergency dial 999.

All other members in your household should follow the guidance on self-isolation provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net .

12. I have a member of staff who is absent with COVID-19 (coronavirus) symptoms. Should I tell their colleagues about this?

The vast majority of people will decide for themselves whether they have COVID-19 (coronavirus) symptoms by using the automated PHA guidance.

No additional special measures need to be taken by anyone: all employees should already be following the guidance on social distancing and advice about good hygiene practices, especially frequent thorough hand washing, and avoiding touching their face.

You should talk to your member of staff who is unwell and ask them how much information about them they would be happy for you to disclose to others. Many employees will not mind their colleagues knowing the reason they are absent. If you're unwell member of staff does not want their work colleagues to know, as a manager you must be aware of data protection requirements and not release any more information than is necessary. You do however have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of all your staff and it is therefore important that you keep them informed of the number of COVID-19 cases within in your Business Area / location.

13. What happens if a member of staff displays coronavirus symptoms again after an earlier period of self-isolation?

Coronavirus presents a significant spectrum of symptoms from very mild to severe. It was not previously possible to state with certainty, whether someone experiencing symptoms had the virus or at what stage anyone, was contagious. However, everyone over five years of age in Northern Ireland with symptoms of coronavirus is now eligible for testing.

A member of staff who is experiencing any of the symptoms at any stage should continue to follow the advice on the www.publichealth.hscni.net to check their symptoms and follow the hand washing, stay at home and 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.

You should record the absence on HRConnect under Chest and Respiratory problems and the sickness sub reason as COVID-19 and provide your member of staff with advice on how to book a test for themselves and their household, to confirm if they have the virus.

Testing is prioritised for staff deemed to be performing an essential/key role who are self-isolating because they are symptomatic, or have household members who are symptomatic.

COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) TESTING

1. I am a member of staff and am having to self-isolate because I have coronavirus-like symptoms or a member of my household has symptoms. Can I be tested?

Yes, you are eligible for testing which is open to everyone over five years of age, who are self-isolating because they are symptomatic, or have household members who are symptomatic.

More details on testing can be found on the PHA website [Information on Coronavirus National Testing Programme](#). This information includes how people who live with you may also be eligible for testing.

Should any change to the eligibility criteria for testing be determined by PHA, NICS guidance for managers and staff will be reviewed accordingly.

2. My member of staff is an essential/key worker who cannot work from home and is having to self-isolate because they have coronavirus-like symptoms or a member of their household has symptoms. What should I do regarding arranging testing?

If your member of staff is an essential/key worker they are eligible for priority testing.

Full details on the testing programme, including test centre location and details of how to arrange testing can be found on the PHA website [Information on Coronavirus National Testing Programme](#).

Should any change to the eligibility criteria for testing be determined by PHA, NICS guidance for managers and staff will be reviewed accordingly.

3. My member of staff is an essential/key worker who cannot work from home and was self-isolating because they or a member of their household had symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus). They have been tested under the national testing programme. What should I do next?

You will already be in close contact with your member of staff during this time. Should they, or any member of their household, test positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus) they should continue to self-isolate for the required time. If no-one in the household has COVID-19 (coronavirus) then you should make arrangements for your member of staff to return to work. You should advise them of the current health and well-being arrangements that are in place in line with social distancing measures and discuss any concerns they should have about returning to the workplace.

If your member of staff has tested negative for COVID-19 (coronavirus), their absence should be ended on HRConnect, from the date the test result was received. If they should still remain too unwell to return to work, a new absence should be opened under the appropriate (non-coronavirus related) SART code.

4. I am an essential/key worker and am currently in the workplace. Can I have a test to see if I have COVID-19 (coronavirus)?

No, currently in Northern Ireland only essential/key workers who are having to self-isolate because they have COVID-19-like symptoms, or live with someone who has symptoms, are eligible for a priority test in order to determine if they may either return to the workplace or should continue to self-isolate.

More details on testing for essential/key workers can be found on the PHA website [Information on Coronavirus National Testing Programme](#).

Should any change to the eligibility criteria for testing be determined by PHA, NICS guidance for managers and staff will be reviewed accordingly.

5. I am currently self-isolating because I have coronavirus-like symptoms. I am unsure if I am an essential/key worker and therefore eligible for a priority test. What should I do?

Priority testing is currently targeted at essential/key workers who are self-isolating because they are symptomatic, or have household members who are symptomatic, to help enable critical workers to return to work as soon as safely possible. If you have any doubt whether you fall into this category, you should ask your line manager for confirmation.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

1. What is social distancing?

Social distancing measures are steps we all must take to reduce the social interaction between people. These measures will help reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

The current social distancing measures in Northern Ireland can be found at [COVID-19 Information for the public](#)

Every citizen must comply with these measures. The NI Executive is regularly reviewing social distancing measures in line with the five-step Pathway to Recovery and will relax them if and when the evidence shows this is possible.

If you are required to come into work to perform an **essential** role, as determined by your Department, then all steps will be taken by your Department to implement social distancing.

Currently relevant business areas should seek to take all steps to protect staff including:

- ensuring staff are sitting 2 metres apart;
- putting in place rotas that are based on the absolute minimum numbers of staff required to deliver essential service/perform essential duties;
- putting in place working hours/patterns/shifts/ rotas that minimise time in the office and the use of public transport; and
- using technology as much as possible to minimise time in office.

Currently NICS staff who cannot work from home **must** stay away from the workplace if you are:

- over 70;
- are either in the vulnerable or extremely vulnerable people categories (see link below for further details); or
- pregnant.

NICS staff in the categories above will continue to be paid until further notice. This position will be kept under review as government advice is reviewed.

See links below for the latest guidance on social distancing and vulnerable people:

[COVID-19 Information for the public](#)

[COVID-19 advice for vulnerable people](#)

This guidance also explains what to do if you have, or think you have, COVID-19 (coronavirus) infection or have been exposed to the virus.

In addition, further guidance on safety in the workplace can be found on the HSENI website [here](#)

2. I use public transport to get to work and I am worried about catching COVID – 19 (coronavirus). What should I do?

Where you are required to perform an **essential** role as determined by your Department and cannot work from home, you should attend work as normal but follow the good hygiene practices.

It is recommended to wear a face covering whilst travelling on public transport. Face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease, if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms.

It is important not to get a false sense of security about the level of protection provided to you by wearing a face covering. It is essential that you continue to:

- wash your hands thoroughly throughout the day
- 'catch it, kill it, bin it' when you sneeze or cough

That's still the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

You should follow the social distancing measures whilst travelling to reduce the social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

Social distancing measures include:

- avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus COVID-19 (coronavirus). These symptoms include high temperature, a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste.
- avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible

The relevant business areas should seek to take all steps to protect staff including:

- ensuring they are sitting 2 metres apart;
- putting in place rotas that are based on the absolute minimum numbers of staff required to deliver essential service/perform essential duties;
- putting in place working hours/patterns/shifts/ rotas that minimise time in the office and the use of public transport; and
- using technology as much as possible to minimise time in office

3. What can I do to protect myself from and others against the virus?

You should follow the Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance on social distancing [COVID-19 Information for the public](#)

Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce the social interaction between people. These measures will help reduce the transmission of COVID-19. With regards to the workplace, the Executive has agreed that:

- Anyone who can work from home must work from home;
- Employers must facilitate working from home where it is feasible;
- No employer should compel an employee to come to work if it is feasible to work from home;

- Every employer must take all reasonable steps to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of employees during the COVID-19 emergency, whether working from home or in the workplace;
- Every employer must have particular regard to the safety of employees in the workplace and must put into effect the guidance on social distancing issued by the Department for the Economy;
- Every employer has a legal duty to ensure, so far as it is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees.

You can also take simple steps to reduce the risk of catching or spreading coronavirus.

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash your hands afterwards
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- consider using face coverings in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible e.g. on public transport or in some shops.

Currently NICS staff who cannot work from home **must** stay away from the workplace if they are:

- over 70;
- are in either the vulnerable or extremely vulnerable people categories (see link below for further details); or
- pregnant.

NICS staff in the categories above will continue to be paid until further notice. This position will be kept under review as government advice is updated.

See link below for details:

[COVID-19 advice for vulnerable people](#)

In addition, further guidance on safety in the workplace can be found on the HSENI website [here](#)

4. I work in an office that serves the public or has contractors/other non-NICS staff in attendance. What are my obligations to them?

Currently, everyone must follow the guidance on social distancing and ensure this is being adhered to in the workplace. These measures should also be afforded to members of the public and contractors/other non-NICS staff who visit the workplace.

For guidance on safety in the workplace see the COVID-19 Safety Measures advice for businesses on the Health and Safety Executive NI website [here](#).

If you have any concerns you should speak with your line manager, in the first instance.

You can also contact your Departmental Health and Safety Officer for further information. Contact details are available [here](#).

5. I have questions about how social distancing is being operated in my workplace. Who can I speak to?

You should speak to your line manager in the first instance with any questions or concerns. In addition, each Department has a Health and Safety Officer whose details can be found on your Departmental intranet site.

For more guidance on safety in the workplace see the COVID-19 Safety Measures advice for businesses on the Health and Safety Executive NI website [here](#)

You can also contact your Departmental Health and Safety Officer for further information. Contact details are available [here](#).

6. A member of my team has concerns about how social distancing is being operated in the workplace. Where can I find more information?

Currently, everyone must follow the guidance on social distancing and managers must ensure this is being adhered to in the workplace. You should note that in cases where a member of your team lives with a vulnerable person they must be particularly stringent about following the social distancing measures.

For further advice please see [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#)

For further guidance on safety in the workplace see the COVID-19 Safety Measures advice for businesses on the Health and Safety Executive NI website [here](#).

If you have any concerns you should speak with your line manager, in the first instance.

You can also contact your Departmental Health and Safety Officer for further information. Contact details are available [here](#).

SELF ISOLATING

1. If I need to self-isolate, what am I expected to do?

If you need to self-isolate you are expected to follow the advice on COVID-19 [\(coronavirus\)](#) provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net which is to stay at home. If you are symptom free, and if you can work from home then do so, your manager should make arrangements for you to work from home. If this is not possible, your manager will record this as paid special leave.

When in self-isolation you should monitor your symptoms and consult the PHA website www.publichealth.hscni.net

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus) while self-isolating, a high temperature, a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, you must remain at home and inform your line manager. Your line manager will cease your special leave arrangement and record as a period of sickness absence under Chest and Respiratory problems and the sickness sub reason COVID-19. Remember you are required to self-isolate for a period of 7 days after you become ill with a symptom of COVID-19 so you may not return to the workplace within this period. If you are working from home you may commence work within the 7 day period if you are fit to do so.

If you have symptoms you should not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital. If you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or if your condition gets worse, or you do not get better after 7 days, or if you have underlying medical conditions; then you are advised to telephone your GP or in a medical emergency dial 999.

Should you develop symptoms of COVID-19 and have received a letter from your GP practice to confirm you have been identified as someone who is at risk of severe illness if you catch COVID-19, you should follow the instructions given to you in that letter.

2. I am a vulnerable person as covered by the PHA guidance and [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(Northern Ireland\) Regulations 2020](#). Does this mean that I must self-isolate (shield)?

Not everyone falling within the vulnerable person categories must self-isolate (shield). All those people who have been defined on medical grounds as **extremely vulnerable** and at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (coronavirus) will have received a letter from their GP practice strongly advising them to shield. The current advice for people within this category can be found here: [Guidance on shielding for extremely vulnerable people](#)

Those within the **vulnerable** people category, who did not receive a letter from their GP, have been advised by PHA to be particularly strict in following social distancing measures. Details for this group of people can be found here: [COVID-19 advice for vulnerable people](#)

Currently all NICS staff who are in both the vulnerable people category and the extremely vulnerable people category have been advised to stay at home and to work from home where this is possible. This position will be kept under review as government advice is updated.

3. I have received a letter from my GP to tell me I am in the extremely vulnerable people category and that should self-isolate (shield). My role cannot be carried out from home. How much special leave can I take?

As you are in the extremely vulnerable category then, in line with current advice, you must stay away from the workplace. If you can work from home then do so. If work cannot be found for you to carry out at home, including allocating you alternative duties, then you will be paid for the time you are not in the work place.

On this basis your manager will keep in contact with you to review these arrangements taking into account any change in published medical advice.

More information can be found here: [Guidance on shielding for extremely vulnerable people](#)

4. I live with others and I have a high temperature and/or a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste. What should I do?

If you live with others and you are the first in the household to have symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), however mild, then you must stay at home for 7 days, but **all other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days**. The 14-day isolation period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill. You should advise your line manager who should record your absence as a period of sickness under Chest and Respiratory problems and the sickness sub reason COVID-19. This period of sickness absence will not impact on sickness absence review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of your sickness absence relating to COVID-19, you are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

Normal contact arrangements apply and you should keep in touch with your manager about your absence and expected date of return.

Follow the advice on COVID-19 (coronavirus) provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net

5. The person I live with has a high temperature and/or a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste. What should I do?

If you live with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), a high temperature and/or a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, however mild, you should advise your line manager, self-isolate and stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms. However, if you develop symptoms during this 14-day isolation period, you'll need to stay at home for 7 days from the day your symptoms started (regardless of what day you are on in the original 14-day period). This may mean you have to stay at home for a maximum of 21 days.

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus) you must inform your line manager immediately. Your line manager will cease your special leave arrangement and record as a period of sickness absence under Chest and Respiratory problems and the sickness sub reason COVID-19. This period of sickness absence will not impact on sickness absence review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of your sickness absence relating to COVID-19, you are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

Normal contact arrangements apply and you should keep in touch with your manager about your absence and expected date of return.

Follow the advice on COVID-19 (coronavirus) provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net.

6. My member of staff is self-isolating as they live with someone who is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus). How should I record this absence on HRConnect?

If they are symptom free this should be recorded on HRConnect as a period of special leave (up to 10 working days (14 calendar days) as [Domestic Crisis](#) with the sub heading [COVID-19 Self isolate](#).

If the member of staff subsequently advises that they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 then the special leave arrangement should cease and a period of sickness absence entered on HRConnect, under Chest and Respiratory problems and the sickness sub reason COVID-19. This period of sickness absence will not impact on sickness absence review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of their sickness absence relating to COVID-19, they are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

More information can be found on [guidance for inputting absence on HRConnect](#).

7. I live with someone who is in the extremely vulnerable category and has been advised to self-isolate (shield) in a letter from their GP practice. Should I still go to work?

If you live with or care for someone in the extremely vulnerable category who has received a letter from their GP to shield, then all efforts should be made to facilitate your working from home, including allocating you alternative duties where possible.

If working from home is not possible, you should continue to attend work if you are required to perform an essential role as determined by your Department.

In accordance with the latest PHA guidance, you should support the person you live with to stay safe and strictly follow guidance on social distancing measures. Guidance for those living with an extremely vulnerable person can be found on the nidirect website [here](#).

If you have any concerns about your ability to strictly follow the guidance on social distancing you should discuss with your line manager to ensure alternative arrangements are made.

VULNERABLE PEOPLE

1. I am a vulnerable person as covered by the PHA guidance and [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(Northern Ireland\) Regulations 2020](#). Does this mean that I must self-isolate (shield)?

Not everyone falling within the vulnerable person categories must self-isolate (shield).

All those people who have been defined on medical grounds as **extremely vulnerable** and at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (coronavirus) will have received a letter

from their GP practice strongly advising them to shield. The current advice for people within this category can be found here: [Guidance on shielding for extremely vulnerable people](#)

Those within the **vulnerable** people category, who did not receive a letter from their GP, have been advised by PHA to be particularly strict in following social distancing measures. Details for this group of people can be found here: [COVID-19 advice for vulnerable people](#)

Currently all NICS staff who are in both the vulnerable people category and the extremely vulnerable people category have been advised to stay at home and to work from home where this is possible. This position will be kept under review as government advice is updated.

2. I have received a letter from my GP to tell me I am in the extremely vulnerable category. My role cannot be carried out from home. Will I remain on special leave?

As you are in the extremely vulnerable category then in line with current guidance you **must** shield and therefore you must stay away from the workplace. If you can work from home then you must do so. If work cannot be found for you to carry out at home, including allocating you alternative duties where possible, then you will be paid for the time you are not in the workplace.

On this basis your manager will keep in contact with you to review the arrangements taking into account any change in government advice.

More information can be found here: [Guidance on shielding for extremely vulnerable people](#)

3. I have not received a letter from my GP practice to say that I am in the extremely vulnerable category but I think I should have one. What should I do?

You should contact your GP practice to discuss and to ensure your records are up to date.

4. I live with someone who is in the extremely vulnerable person category has been advised to self-isolate (shield) in a letter from their GP. Should I still go to work?

If you live with or care for someone in the extremely vulnerable category who has received a letter from their GP to shield, then all efforts should be made to facilitate your working from home, including allocating you alternative duties where possible.

If working from home is not possible, you should continue to attend work if you are required to perform an essential role as determined by your Department.

In accordance with the latest PHA guidance, you should support the person you live with to stay safe and strictly follow guidance on social distancing measures. Guidance for those living with an extremely vulnerable person can be found on the nidirect website [here](#).

If you have any concerns about your ability to strictly follow the guidance on social distancing you should discuss with your line manager to ensure alternative arrangements are made.

5. I am under aged 70 and have an underlying health condition which places me in the vulnerable people category. Should I go to work?

Currently all NICS staff who are in the vulnerable people category have been advised to stay at home and to work from home where this is possible, including the allocation of alternative duties. If this is not possible then you will be paid for the time you are not in the workplace. You should notify your line manager who will keep in contact with you to review the arrangements and to take account of any change in NICS policy.

6. I live with someone under aged 70 who has an underlying health condition which places them in the vulnerable people category. Should I go to work?

Currently you should be working from home where possible and only attending work if you are required to perform an essential role, as determined by your Department which cannot be done at home.

You should pay particular attention to the current guidance which advises those who live with vulnerable people to **strictly follow** social distancing measures. If you have concerns about how this is operating in the workplace, you should raise the matter with your line manager and discuss putting alternative arrangements in place.

7. I am pregnant and worried about my baby. Should I go to work?

Currently all NICS staff who are in the vulnerable people category have been advised to stay at home and to work from home where this is possible, including the allocation of alternative duties. If this is not possible then you will be paid for the time you are not in the workplace. You should notify your line manager who will keep in contact with you to review the arrangements and to take account of any change in NICS policy.

8. I live with someone who is pregnant. Should I go to work?

Currently you should be working from home where possible and only attending work if you are required to perform an essential role, as determined by your Department which cannot be done at home.

You should pay particular attention to the current guidance which advises those who live with vulnerable people to **strictly follow** social distancing measures. If you have concerns about how this is operating in the workplace, you should raise the matter with your line manager and discuss putting alternative arrangements in place.

9. I am over aged 70. Should I go to work?

Currently all NICS staff who are in the vulnerable people category have been advised to stay at home and to work from home where this is possible, including the allocation of alternative duties. If this is not possible then you will be paid for the time you are not in the workplace. You should notify your line manager who will keep in contact with you to review the arrangements and to take account of any change in NICS policy.

10. I live with someone who is over aged 70. Should I go to work?

Currently you should be working from home where possible and only attending work if you are required to perform an essential role, as determined by your Department which cannot be done at home.

You should pay particular attention to the current guidance which advises those who live with vulnerable people to **strictly follow** social distancing measures. If you have concerns about how this is operating in the workplace, you should raise the matter with your line manager and discuss putting alternative arrangements in place.

11. I live with someone who is in the vulnerable people or extremely vulnerable people category and I have a high temperature and/or a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste. What should I do?

If you have symptoms COVID-19 (coronavirus), however mild, and live with someone who is in the vulnerable or extremely vulnerable people category then you should follow the advice given in [COVID-19 advice for vulnerable people or Guidance on shielding for extremely vulnerable people](#)

CARE OF DEPENDANTS

1. My member of staff is not ill but has children and is worried about infecting them. What should I tell them?

In line with current advice, NICS staff should only be attending the workplace if they are required to perform an essential role as determined by their Department that cannot be done at home.

If the member of staff who is concerned about their children is required to come into work to perform an essential role, as determined by their Department, then all steps will be taken by their Department to implement social distancing.

The relevant business areas should seek to take all steps to protect staff including:

- ensuring that staff are sitting 2 metres apart;
- putting in place rotas that are based on the absolute minimum numbers of staff required to deliver essential service/perform essential duties;
- putting in place working hours/patterns/shifts/ rotas that minimise time in the office and the use of public transport; and
- using technology as much as possible to minimise time in office.

See link below for the latest government guidance on social distancing:

[COVID-19 Information for the public](#)

Everyone should follow PHA advice about good hygiene practices especially frequent thorough hand washing see [preventing the spread of infection](#)

2. What should I do if the person who cares for my children/other dependent (e.g. sick/elderly relative) is self-isolating because they have symptoms of COVID – 19 (coronavirus) and is not available to care for them as normal ?

Where you are required to attend work to perform an **essential** role, as determined by your Department, you should make efforts to make alternative arrangements e.g. family or friend or, if it would be possible for you to work from home, you should discuss this with your line manager. If these arrangements are not possible, you should apply for paid special leave as noted in the Manager and Staff guidance.

3. I have been designated as an essential worker. Can my child attend school?

Yes, if your department has requested that you attend work, as your role has been deemed essential, you may send your child to school.

Whilst only one parent need be an essential worker, children should only attend school if they cannot be safely cared for at home.

If your child's school should request confirmation that you are an essential worker, the e-mail notification from your department that you are in an essential category should suffice.

4. Do I need confirmation from my employer that I am a key worker in order to send my child/children to school?

Children with at least one parent or carer who are identified as essential workers by the government can send their child/children to school. The purpose of opening schools is to ensure that essential workers can still attend their place of work and provide vital services. Some schools are seeking confirmation that a parent is an essential worker. The Department's e-mail notification to staff that they are in the essential category should suffice.

5. I have been told I am an essential worker but my role cannot be carried out from home however I have caring responsibilities. What should I do?

If you have been advised that you are an essential worker whose work cannot be done at home, you have exhausted your entitlement to the total of 15 days special leave to care for your dependent/s outlined above, and your dependent/s cannot be looked after by anyone else, you should notify your manager and provide evidence of your circumstances. It will then be a decision for your manager/department how best to move forward given your particular circumstances. Matters relating to individual personal circumstances will be addressed on a case by case basis.

Your circumstances will be regularly reviewed by your line manager and it is essential that you keep in contact.

SICKNESS ABSENCE

1. My member of staff has advised that they have symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus). How should I record this on HRConnect?

You should record this as a period of sickness absence under [Chest and Respiratory problems](#) and the sickness sub reason [COVID-19](#). You should also advise NICS HR ER immediately via e-mail. More information can be found on [guidance for inputting absence on HRConnect](#).

2. My member of staff has not turned up for work and is not scheduled to be off. They also haven't advised me, another manager or any of their colleagues. What should I do?

You should follow the normal 'unauthorised absence' procedures and due to the current situation try to contact by phone and/or email where possible.

3. What effect will a period of sickness absence due to COVID-19 will have on my sickness absence record?

All periods of sickness absence that have been either diagnosed as COVID-19 or symptomatic of the virus either at home or at work will not impact on sickness absence review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of your sickness absence relating to COVID-19, you are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

4. I am a probationer. What effect will a period of sickness absence due to COVID-19 (coronavirus) will have on my sickness absence record?

All periods of sickness absence that have been either diagnosed as COVID-19 (coronavirus) or symptomatic of the virus either at home or at work will not impact on sickness absence review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of your sickness absence relating to COVID-19, you are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

5. I have been off work with flu like symptoms for over 7 calendar days but can't get through to my GP to get a "Fit note. What should I do?

The requirement to have a GP 'Fit Note' has now been suspended for suspected cases of COVID-19. If you absent with flu-like symptoms you should **not** ask your GP for a Fit Note. Once you are fit and able to work at home, or (where you are required to come into work to perform an essential role as determined by your Department) return to work you should obtain the appropriate paper work ("isolation note") through [NHS 111 Online](#) that supports your self-isolation due to COVID -19.

Staff should ignore any automatic alerts sent by HRConnect.

If you are absent due to reasons other than COVID-19 ([coronavirus](#)) or flu-like symptoms you will be required to obtain a backdated fit note from your GP to cover your absence when it is possible to do so.

6. I am currently absent due to long term sickness. How will my absence be managed during these exceptional circumstances?

As a consequence of government guidance in response to COVID-19 (coronavirus) the NICS is required to take measures to reduce social interaction between people in order to reduce the transmission of the coronavirus.

Consequently, the NICS sickness absence procedures have been reviewed and some aspects of the procedures have been suspended in the current circumstances.

It has been decided, at this time and while you remain on sickness absence, that you will not be required to attend any review meetings with either your line manager or your NICS HR Employee Relations Case Manager. In addition all referrals to Occupational Health Service (OHS) have been postponed.

Regular contact arrangements will remain in place whereby either your line manager or caseworker will be in contact:-

- to ensure that you have appropriate support and information; and
- to allow you to provide updates on your health and share any information regarding a planned return to work.

The Welfare Officer will make contact with you during your absence to obtain an update on your health and to provide you with support.

7. I am fit to return to work from a period of sickness absence. What am I expected to do?

You should communicate with your line manager using your agreed method of contact and advise that you are ready to report for duty. If you can work from home then do so. If you are required to come into work to perform an **essential** role, as determined by your Department then discuss with your manager. If applicable, discuss any adjustments that may be required to facilitate your return to work (if adjustments can't be accommodated you will have to remain on sick absence).

Your line manager should close your current period of sickness absence on HRConnect. Any period of full paid, half paid or unpaid sickness absence will end.

Remember if you have been ill with a symptom of COVID-19, you may not return to the workplace within the 7 day self-isolation period. However, if you are working from home you may commence work within this period if you are fit to do so.

The following then applies:

- Your line manager will carry out a return to work interview with you, by telephone.
- If you are over 70, pregnant or in a vulnerable category, you must stay at home.

- If you can work from home, you must do so.
- If you have to come in to work to perform an essential role then your business area should seek to take all steps to protect you in line with guidance on social distancing.
- Where your manager does not consider your role to be essential to delivering key services at this time, then stay away from the workplace. Over the next few days and weeks meaningful work will be sought for you to do.

8. What do I do if I am working at home and I start feeling ill with COVID - 19 (coronavirus) symptoms?

If you become unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, you should advise your manager that you are unwell. You will commence a period of sickness absence that will continue until you are fit to resume your work duties. Remember you are required to self-isolate for a period of 7 days after you become ill with a symptom of COVID-19 so you may not return to the workplace within this period. Where you are continuing to work from home you may commence work within the 7 day period if you are fit to do so.

Your period of absence will not impact on sickness review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of your sickness absence relating to COVID-19, you are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

Normal contact arrangements apply and you should keep in touch with your manager about your absence.

Do not visit your GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or if your condition gets worse, or you do not get better after 7 days, or if you have underlying medical conditions; then you are advised to telephone your GP or in a medical emergency dial 999.

All other members in your household should follow the guidance on self-isolation provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net .

9. My member of staff is ill but they say it doesn't feel like flu. Their nose is running like a cold but no high temperature or no new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste. What should I do?

You should advise them to check the online guidance provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) www.publichealth.hscni.net. If their symptoms do not match those of COVID-19 (coronavirus) and they are fit to attend work they should continue to work from home if possible or in the office if it is essential for them to do so. They are not required take sickness absence unless they are too unwell to work. They should also observe the good personal hygiene practices (frequent, thorough hand washing etc.).

If they develop symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), a high temperature and / or a new, continuous cough, or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, they must remain at home and record as a period of sickness on HRConnect, under chest and respiratory problems, COVID-19 (coronavirus).

10. What do I do if I start feeling ill in the workplace with COVID - 19 (coronavirus) symptoms?

If you are required to come into work to perform an **essential** role as determined by your Department and become unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, you should immediately tell your manager you are unwell and you will be sent home to commence a period of sickness absence until you are fit to return to work. Remember you are required to self-isolate for a period of 7 days after you become ill with a symptom of COVID-19 so you may not return to the workplace within this period.

You should consult the PHA website www.publichealth.hscni.net for guidance immediately. You do not need to seek medical advice before self-isolating. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a colleague has helped you when you were taken unwell with a new, continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

- If you need to wait for medical assistance, you may be moved to an area which is at least two metres away from other people. If possible your manager may find a room or area where you can be isolated behind a closed door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window for ventilation.
- You should remain at least two metres from other people. You should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and to cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag or pocket then throw the tissue in the bin. If you don't have any tissues available, you should cough and sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- If you need to go to the bathroom while waiting for medical assistance, you should use a separate bathroom if available.

11. I live on my own and I have a high temperature and/or a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste, what should I do?

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), however mild, you should notify your line manager and stay at home for 7 days from when your symptoms started. Your line manager should record this as a period of sickness absence under Chest and Respiratory problems and the sickness sub reason COVID-19. This period of sickness absence will not impact on sickness absence review points or contractual sick pay. Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. However, if at the beginning of your sickness absence relating to COVID-19, you are entitled to either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay), this level of Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

- Normal contact arrangements apply and you should keep in touch with your manager about your absence and expected date of return.

- Follow the advice on COVID-19 (coronavirus) provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net
- Remember you may not return to the workplace within the 7 day self-isolation period. However, if you are working from home you may commence work within this period if you are fit to do so.

12. I have symptoms of COVID-19 and am therefore on sickness absence. I am unable to collect a fit note in support of my Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claim. Does this mean my ESA will be stopped?

No, payments will continue to all NICS staff who qualify for ESA. Special arrangements have been made which will allow all new ESA claimants who are self-isolating to be covered automatically for the first four weeks of a new claim. If you are already in receipt of ESA, the most recent medical certificate will be extended to cover the same duration, for example, if your last fit note was for a four week period, this will be automatically extended for a further four weeks. Given the exceptional circumstances, the position will continue to be reviewed.

13. I have been absent with COVID-19 for more than 7 calendar days. Do I now need to obtain a Fit Note from my GP?

In line with [PHA guidance](#) you **must not** contact your GP for a 'Fit Note' if you are ill with coronavirus symptoms of either a high temperature, a new, continuous cough or a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste. You should obtain an isolation note through [NHS 111 Online](#) to provide evidence that you have been advised to self-isolate due to coronavirus.

14. My member of staff has been absent with COVID-19 for more than 7 calendar days, should I advise them that they now need to obtain a Fit note?

In line with [PHA guidance](#) you **must not** request that your member of staff contacts their GP for a 'Fit Note' if they are ill with COVID-19.

You must direct them to access [NHS 111 Online](#) to obtain an isolation note that can be used as an alternative to a fit note, which provides evidence they have been advised to self-isolate due to coronavirus.

15. My member of staff is absent due to illness and has now advised that they have developed symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus). What should I do?

You should close your member of staff's current period of sickness absence on the HRConnect portal and then open a new absence under [Chest and Respiratory problems](#) and the sickness sub reason [COVID-19](#). More information can be found [here](#).

When your member of staff recovers from COVID-19 you should close this period of sickness absence on the HRConnect portal, if your member of staff remains unavailable for work because of a different sickness absence reason (including the reason they were off prior to developing COVID-19 symptoms), you should open a new absence on the HRConnect portal.

16. I received a Final Written Warning following a previous period of sickness absence and I am concerned about the affect a further absence due to COVID-19 will have on my sickness absence record.

All periods of sickness absence that have been either diagnosed as COVID-19 or symptomatic of the virus either at home or at work will not impact on sickness absence review points or contractual sick pay.

Any absence due to COVID-19 will not lead to a pay detriment. When you were issued with your Final Written Warning (FWW) you were advised that Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) would not be payable during the first six months of this warning, however, if your absence is due to COVID-19, your suspension of OSP will temporarily stop. Depending on your OSP entitlement, you will receive either full pay, half pay or nil pay (pension rate of pay) and this level of pay will be maintained throughout the duration of this period of absence.

When your period of COVID-19 sickness absence ends, your suspension of OSP will recommence, effective from the point of where it was temporarily stopped. Your entitlement to OSP will not be restored until a minimum period of six months has been completed (excluding your COVID-19 absence).

Any period(s) of sickness absence due to COVID-19 will not change the expiry date of your FWW.

SPECIAL LEAVE

1. My member of staff is self-isolating as they live with someone who is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus). How should I record this on HRConnect?

If they are symptom free this should be recorded on HRConnect as a period of special leave (up to 10 working days (14 calendar days) as [Domestic Crisis](#) with the sub heading [COVID-19 Self isolate](#). If the member of staff advises that they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 then the special leave arrangement should cease and a period of sickness absence entered on HRConnect. More information can be found on [guidance for inputting absence on HRConnect](#).

2. I have recently received a letter from my GP to tell me I should self-isolate for 12 weeks. My role cannot be carried out from home. How much special leave can I take?

If you are a vulnerable person in line with the PHA guidance you must stay away from the workplace. If you can work from home then do so. If work cannot be found for you to carry out at home then you will be paid for the time you are not in the work place. On this basis your manager will keep in contact with you to review the arrangements taking in to account any change in published medical advice.

3. Can you take special leave multiple times for Covid-19 (coronavirus)?

Potentially yes, special leave may be required for a number of different reasons relating to COVID-19 ([coronavirus](#)) i.e. self-isolation, caring responsibilities, social distancing, or other reasons such as office closure.

4. In the event that I become unexpectedly absent as a result of COVID-19, what can I do to ensure that my staff will continue to be managed in respect of annual leave, special leave, etc?

Given the impact of the ongoing pandemic, you must agree with your line manager a contingency arrangement whereby another manager will have the authority to agree leave arrangements for your staff if you are unexpectedly absent from work. This will normally be the next line manager or in some instances, another manager within your team with the appropriate security clearance, where applicable.

For step by step guidance on how to provide another manager with access to your worklist on HRConnect, select the following link, [Granting Worklist Access & setting your Out of Office rule](#).

5. One of my managers has taken ill unexpectedly with COVID-19 and had not made arrangements to provide another manager with access to their worklist on HRConnect in the event of their absence. How can I ensure that their staff will continue to have their leave arrangements, e.g. annual leave, special leave etc, managed?

You can update HRConnect with the details of the line manager who will assume responsibility for managing the absence of this group of staff. This will normally be their next line manager or in some instances, another manager within your team with the appropriate security clearance, where applicable.

To temporarily change the line manager to whom these staff report, log on to **HRConnect** and action **via Manager Self-Service, 'Other Manager Actions'** and select **'Change Line Manager'**. The new line manager will, from the date authority has been transferred to them, receive alerts for any new notifications. For more information please refer the step by step guidance, [Changing Line Manager Quick Reference Guide](#).

Staff should be advised about this temporary arrangement and asked to bring any outstanding actions that require approval to the attention of the temporary manager.

FAMILY LEAVE

1. What happens if I am due to apply for or start a period of family leave, in other words, maternity, paternity, adoption or shared parental leave, during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak?

The normal arrangements for maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental leave continue to apply. Please refer to the relevant policy for details - [Maternity Policy](#), [Paternity Policy](#), [Adoption Leave Policy](#), and [Shared Parental Leave Policy](#).

LEAVE

1. I have a member of staff who is due to be on annual leave/flexi leave but they have now notified me that they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus). What happens to the annual leave/flexi leave they were due to take?

Where a member of staff is ill with symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), you should cancel the annual leave/flexi leave and record a period of sickness absence.

2. I have a member of staff who is due to be on annual leave/flexi leave but they have notified me that they are self-isolating because another person in their household is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus). What happens to the annual leave/flexi leave they were due to take?

If the member of staff is symptom-free, this should be recorded on HRConnect as a period of special leave (up to 10 working days (14 calendar days) as Domestic Crisis with the sub heading COVID-19 Self-isolate. Their annual leave/flexi leave should be cancelled and will be available to take at a later date.

If the member of staff subsequently advises that they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, then the special leave arrangement should cease and a period of sickness absence should be entered on HRConnect.

3. A member of staff has requested annual leave/flexi leave. Can I refuse this request?

Taking annual leave/flexi leave is important to aid rest and recuperation and should be allowed where possible. Staff who do not take annual leave may be at more risk of fatigue and mental-health related sickness absence. Therefore, they should be encouraged to take annual leave/flexi leave, where this can be supported by the business, to help ensure that they take an appropriate rest from work even if this must be confined to activities permissible within the current travel and social distancing instructions.

Managers should consider all applications for leave sympathetically and be flexible in their approach to accommodate requests made.

In line with NICS policy, a request for annual leave/flexi leave can be refused due to business need. However, managers should only refuse leave where this is necessary and the only viable option.

4. I am unsure how best to manage my team's annual leave over the next number of months. What should I do?

You should manage the annual leave for your team in line with normal arrangements as much as possible. The COVID-19 Guidance for managers and staff details annual leave principles and best practice for managers. You should be mindful of the importance of taking leave to have a rest from work and apply this to both yourself and your staff. This includes those staff who are currently at home awaiting work or on extended paid special leave and who will still benefit from switching off from the keeping in touch activities you should have in place.

5. I am concerned that some of my staff are reluctant to take annual leave in the current situation. How can I encourage my staff to take leave to assist their health and wellbeing?

All staff require a break from work for their own general health and wellbeing, which in turn will benefit the wellbeing and resilience of your team. As a manager, you should lead by example by ensuring you take annual leave. You should actively manage and monitor the

annual leave taken within your team and ensure leave arrangements are discussed and planned in advance, for example by issuing a summer leave chart or by regularly raising at team/management meetings.

6. I have staff who are currently at home awaiting suitable work/IT equipment. Should I include these staff in annual leave arrangements for my team?

Yes, it is important to include these staff in any team discussions you have about annual leave so they understand that they are not being prevented from taking their annual leave and are both entitled and expected to have a complete rest from keeping in touch and being available for work.

7. I am currently working from home/an essential worker who is required to attend work. I have pre-booked annual leave/flexi leave. Can I still take this leave?

Taking annual/flexi leave is important to ensure you have an appropriate rest from work and, therefore, should be allowed whenever possible. In line with NICS policy, staff can be required to cancel or postpone annual/flexi leave due to business need. However this should only be done where necessary and the only viable option available to your manager.

8. If I am prevented from taking annual leave during the 2020/21 leave year because I am required to work, will I be allowed to carry over that leave and take it at a later date?

Yes, where you have not been allowed to take annual leave because the additional challenges of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic mean that management required you to work, you will be allowed to carry over that untaken leave in full under the existing provision in paragraph 3.1.3 of policy [3.07 Annual Leave](#). In the NICS annual leave carry-over is considered at the end of each leave year. Therefore, in the event that you were again prevented from taking your leave in the next leave year, the same provision would apply.

You are encouraged to take annual leave, where the business can support this, to help ensure that you have an appropriate rest from work even if this must be confined to activities that are permissible within the current travel and social distancing instructions.

9. A member of my team does not want to take annual leave while they are on paid special leave or at home awaiting suitable work/IT equipment. Can I encourage them to take leave?

Staff in these circumstances should be encouraged to take annual leave to ensure that they can have the benefit of a period of rest and relaxation away from being available for work. You should ensure these staff are aware that they are not being prevented by management from taking their annual leave, and therefore the provisions for carrying over excess annual leave outlined in Q5 above will not apply.

10. Do I have to take annual leave if I feel that it increases the burden on my colleagues?

For many staff these feelings are understandable. However, we have personal responsibility to look after our own wellbeing so that we can be strong and resilient for others. Annual leave is a key part of this. Making sure that you and your colleagues can perform at their best is the best way to support and ease the burden on everyone over the next few months.

11. During the period of COVID-19 (coronavirus), can I work flexi time and accrue flexi leave if I am working from home?

At the discretion of your line manager you may work flexi time and accrue flexi leave while you are being required to work from home. This arrangement will continue to be managed by your line manager.

12. A member of my staff has pre-booked annual leave/flexi leave. Can I cancel their leave?

Taking annual leave/flexi leave is important to ensure that staff have an appropriate rest from work and, therefore, should be allowed wherever possible. Staff who do not take annual leave may be at greater risk of fatigue and mental health-related sickness absence. Therefore, you should be encouraging your staff to take annual leave/flexi leave, where this can be supported by the business, to help ensure that they take an appropriate rest from work.

All applications for leave should be considered sympathetically you should be flexible in your approach to accommodate requests wherever possible.

In line with NICS policy, staff can be required to cancel or postpone annual leave/flexi leave due to business need. However, you should only do so where this is necessary and the only viable option.

13. I am an essential worker and want to take time off during the week using annual/flexi leave. Am I able to work overtime on an evening or weekend?

At this challenging time we are keen to balance the need for staff to use annual/flexi leave during the week to have an appropriate break from work with requirements for additional resource availability for evening and weekend working. Where there is a business need for you to work overtime, your manager may consider giving approval for this in a week that you have taken annual/flexi leave.

14. In the event that I become unexpectedly absent as a result of COVID-19, what can I do to ensure that my staff will continue to be managed in respect of annual leave, special leave, etc?

Given the impact of the ongoing pandemic, you must agree with your line manager a contingency arrangement whereby another manager will have the authority to agree leave arrangements for your staff if you are unexpectedly absent from work. This will normally be the next line manager or in some instances, another manager within your team with the appropriate security clearance, where applicable.

For step by step guidance on how to provide another manager with access to your worklist on HRConnect, select the following link, [Granting Worklist Access & setting your Out of Office rule](#).

15. One of my managers has taken ill unexpectedly with COVID-19 and had not made arrangements to provide another manager with access to their worklist on HRConnect

in the event of their absence. How can I ensure that their staff will continue to have their leave arrangements, e.g. annual leave, special leave etc, managed?

You can update HRConnect with the details of the line manager who will assume responsibility for managing the absence of this group of staff. This will normally be their next line manager or in some instances, another manager within your team with the appropriate security clearance, where applicable.

To temporarily change the line manager to whom these staff report, log on to **HRConnect** and action **via Manager Self-Service, 'Other Manager Actions'** and select **'Change Line Manager'**. The new line manager will, from the date authority has been transferred to them, receive alerts for any new notifications. For more information please refer the step by step guidance, [Changing Line Manager Quick Reference Guide](#) .

Staff should be advised about this temporary arrangement and asked to bring any outstanding actions that require approval to the attention of the temporary manager.

16. I no longer wish to take a future period of annual leave that has been approved on HRConnect by my line manager. May I cancel it?

Yes. If you no longer wish to take a future period of annual leave that has been approved on HRConnect, you should contact your line manager to ask them to cancel the period of leave for you. A future-dated period of leave can be cancelled so long as you make your request to your line manager before the period of leave has started.

17. My member of staff has asked to cancel a future period of annual leave that I had approved on HRConnect. Can I delete this leave and, if so, how do I do so?

Where a member of staff no longer wants/needs to take a future period of leave which has been approved on HRConnect, this may be cancelled so long as they submit their request to you before the period of leave has started. Where a period of annual leave has already been taken, it cannot be cancelled.

In order to delete the period of future-dated leave, you will need to follow these steps:

- Click on 'HRConnect Level 2 Manager Self Service'.
- Click on 'Absence Management'.
- Click on 'Leave Request'.
- Locate the row that represents the member of staff whose absence you would like to cancel, then click the 'Action' icon in the 'Action' column.
- Locate the row that represents the period of annual leave that needs cancelled and then click on the 'Delete' icon in the 'Delete' column.
- When the 'Delete Absence: Review' screen appears, click on 'Submit'.

Just after carrying out the above steps, the 'Approval Status' for the period of annual leave in question may temporarily display as 'Pending Approval'. However, this will automatically change to 'Approved' shortly afterwards. This will remove the future-dated period of annual leave from the member of staff's HRConnect record.

Note: Where the member of staff made their cancellation request to you before the period of leave was due to start but you have omitted or been unable to take the above action before the start date of the leave, you will need to email HRConnect directly to request that they amend the employee's record on your behalf.

TERM-TIME

1. I have been identified as an essential worker during the COVID-19 crisis and have been asked by my Head of Branch (or my manager) to cancel an approved period of term-time absence. Given the exceptional circumstances, I am content to continue working for this period, however I am unable to give the required 1 months' notice. What I should do and how the cancellation is actioned?

In normal circumstances, if your Department cancels your term-time absence for "justifiable business reasons" you would be given 1 month's advance notice. However, in the current exceptional circumstances, this requirement may be waived.

Your Head of Branch should forward an email to HRConnect confirming the period of term-time absence to be cancelled and the reasons for cancellation. Although your salary and leave entitlement will be adjusted accordingly, this may take several weeks. You should note that this will cancel only the period of absence specified and will not cancel the entire term-time arrangement. However, if you continue to carry out essential work, your Department may need to cancel further periods of term-time absence, those decisions will be taken in light of the changing circumstances surrounding COVID-19.

Any matters relating to individual personal circumstances will be addressed on a case by case basis

2. I want to cancel a period of approved term-time absence. My plans have been cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis and therefore I do not need to take this time off. I have not been identified as an essential worker. What should I do?

Annex 2, paragraph 14.1 of policy 3.10 Alternative and Flexible Working Patterns advises if you wish to apply to cancel your agreed term-time arrangement, you are required to provide 1 month's written notice to your Head of Branch. Therefore, any requests will not be considered unless the minimum notice period is provided.

If you wish to apply to cancel a period of term-time absence within this financial year, you should forward an e-mail to your Head of Branch a minimum of 1 month prior to the date the period of term-time absence is due to start along with the reasons for your request.

Any matters relating to individual personal circumstances will be addressed on a case by case basis

3. I have been identified as an essential worker during the COVID-19 crisis and have been asked by my Head of Branch (or my manager) to cancel an approved period of term-time absence. I do not want to cancel this period of term-time absence. What should I do?

Each Department has assessed the essential functions and roles required to keep the country running during this time. This has involved certain workers being identified as essential.

Annex 2, paragraph 14.1 of policy 3.10 Alternative and Flexible Working Patterns states “where, for justifiable business reasons, it becomes necessary for a Department to terminate a member of staff’s term-time working arrangement, he/she must be given a minimum of one month’s written notice and full reasons for the termination.”

In normal circumstances if your Department cancels your term-time absence for the above “justifiable business reasons” you would be given 1 month’s advance notice. However, in the current exceptional circumstances, this requirement may be waived.

You should contact your Head of Branch (or your line manager) as soon as possible to further discuss both the reasons it is necessary to cancel your upcoming period of term-time and your reasons for not being content to do so, and these will be considered. Any matters relating to individual personal circumstances will be addressed on a case by case basis.

However you should be aware, whatever the outcome of the above consideration, if you continue to carry out essential work, your Department may need to cancel further periods of term-time absence, those decisions will be taken in light of the changing circumstances surrounding COVID-19.

PUBLIC AND PRIVILEGE HOLIDAYS

1. Will essential workers who are attending work because their work cannot be done from home, and those staff who are working from home, be allowed to take time off on public and privilege holidays?

Staff who are currently attending work (essential workers) or working from home will, so far as possible, be allowed to take time off on the holidays listed in paragraph 1.2 of HR policy [3.06 Public and Privilege Holidays](#). Where they are required to work on any of these holidays, they will be compensated as set out in Section 14 of policy [8.08 Overtime Pay](#).

2. Are staff who are on paid special leave entitled to public and privilege holidays?

Yes, the normal arrangements continue to apply. Where public and privilege holidays fall within a period special leave with pay, these holidays are paid for and are not counted towards the number of days authorised as special leave with pay.

3. Are staff entitled to public and privilege holidays that fall during a period of sickness absence?

No. Public and privilege holidays that fall within a period of sickness absence count as part of the period of sickness absence. There is no right to time off in lieu of these holidays.

OTHER

1. Can arrangements be put in place to allow staff without access to laptops to work from home using their work or private computers?

In order to protect the security and integrity of the secure government network you **must not** use Personal PCs or tablets for Departmental work. All service requests for laptops are being progressed as a matter of urgency.

In some instances IT Assist will be providing existing Desktop computers with the capability to be used to work from home over Secure Remote Access (SRA). This will be by exception and to meet business critical needs.

2. How will Discipline, Dignity at Work (DaW) and Grievance cases be managed during these exceptional circumstances?

As a consequence of government guidance due to COVID-19 (coronavirus) the NICS is required to take measures to reduce social interaction between people in order to reduce the transmission of the coronavirus. Consequently, the NICS procedures for Discipline, DaW and Grievance have been reviewed. Some aspects of the procedures have been suspended and in addition the following shall apply:

- All face to face meetings will be postponed for discipline and grievance procedures. Where feasible and appropriate, telephone discussions will be used.
- Within the limitations of the COVID-19 situation, only discipline matters of a potentially gross misconduct nature will be taken forward.
- Dignity at Work cases will continue to be managed as far as is practicable in the current situation, with the exception of face to face meetings for preliminary and appeal meetings. Telephone conversations and written submissions will be utilised where appropriate and possible.
- Dismissal appeal meetings already arranged will be deferred until current restrictions are lifted.

3. I have symptoms of COVID-19 and am therefore on sickness absence. I am unable to collect a fit note in support of my Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claim. Does this mean my ESA will be stopped?

No, payments will continue to all NICS staff who qualify for ESA. Special arrangements have been made which will allow all new ESA claimants who are self-isolating to be covered automatically for the first four weeks of a new claim. If you are already in receipt of ESA, the most recent medical certificate will be extended to cover the same duration, for example, if your last fit note was for a four week period, this will be automatically extended for a further four weeks. Given the exceptional circumstances, the position will continue to be reviewed.

4. The 2019/20 annual reporting year is due to end on 31 March 2020. What should I do about end of year reviews for my staff?

Where you are currently able to carry out an end of year review without meeting with your member of staff, you may do so. If you are not able to do so, you should put the review on hold and check the position on a regular basis.

5. I work part-time. Can I volunteer to work additional hours?

Yes. Where there is a business need for you to extend your working hours to assist with the delivery of services at this time you may request to do so. This temporary arrangement will not be a contractual change to your working pattern and will be payable as additional hours in line with [HR policy 3.10 Alternative and Flexible Working Patterns](#) Section 4.9 Overtime.

6. I have a member of staff who is within their probation period and they are working from home. Does this period of home working count towards their probation period?

Yes. As long as they are continuing to carry out the duties of their role.

7. If my member of staff is on probation but currently not at work or working from home, should their probation period be suspended?

Short periods of sickness absence or self-isolation would not be considered as an interruption to a period of probation. If, however, they are on a period of prolonged absence which has resulted in them being unable to satisfactorily demonstrate that they can perform their role, you should consider suspension of the probation during the absence.

8. I am currently unable to work from home and am not required to attend the office. Can I work in my second job during my conditioned hours?

No. You are expected to be available for work and may not work for another employer during your normal conditioned hours and whilst you continue to receive your NICS salary. The Standards of Conduct policy states that you are not permitted to undertake “work which would occupy your time or attention, or render you unavailable for duty during **normal official hours...**” (Annex 10 para 1.1).

If you do wish to work in your second job during normal working hours you may apply for unpaid leave for this period.

9. Do I need a PPA/PDP for the 2020/21 annual reporting year?

Yes, all staff should have a PPA/PDP for the 2020/21 annual reporting year. You should speak with your manager (where you are not currently in the workplace this may be by telephone/video call) to discuss your targets for the year and if you can access HRConnect you should complete your PPA/PDP in the normal way. If you cannot currently access HRConnect, you should keep a record of what has been agreed (e-mail or paper copy) until you have the opportunity to complete your PPA/PDP on the system. Due to the management of COVID-19 within your business area, you may be required to agree alternative or additional objectives and display other competencies outside your normal job role. Your end of year review should reflect the full range of duties you have performed over this reporting year.

10. I work in an office that serves the public or has contractors/other non-NICS staff in attendance. What are my obligations to them?

Currently, everyone must follow the guidance on social distancing and ensure this is being adhered to in the workplace. These

measures should also be afforded to members of the public and contractors/other non-NICS staff who visit the workplace.

For guidance on safety in the workplace see the COVID-19 Safety Measures advice for businesses on the Health and Safety Executive NI website [here](#).

If you have any concerns you should speak with your line manager, in the first instance.

You can also contact your Departmental Health and Safety Officer for further information. Contact details are available [here](#).

11. How can I support everyone in my team while we are all working remotely?

Regular virtual team meetings through Cisco Jabber, WebEx, BTMeetMe and TMS can help to make everyone feel included and provide a means to check in on wellbeing and ask colleagues to share tips and coping strategies. Managers should support inclusive virtual meetings in which all participants have the opportunity to feed in individual views and ideas. You should be mindful that online meetings can pose accessibility challenges for some people, such as those with hearing loss or those who may be less inclined to air their opinions. It is therefore important that you support all team members to access the equipment they need to work safely from home and recognise that some team members may face challenges around their home working environment and may not always be able to work in peace and quiet or have limited space for their office equipment. You should ensure that everyone is included in any team online groups such as Whatsapp and distribution lists.

12. In the event that I become unexpectedly absent as a result of COVID-19, what can I do to ensure that my staff will continue to be managed in respect of annual leave, special leave, etc?

Given the impact of the ongoing pandemic, you must agree with your line manager a contingency arrangement whereby another manager will have the authority to agree leave arrangements for your staff if you are unexpectedly absent from work. This will normally be the next line manager or in some instances, another manager within your team with the appropriate security clearance, where applicable.

For step by step guidance on how to provide another manager with access to your worklist on HRConnect, select the following link, [Granting Worklist Access & setting your Out of Office rule](#).

13. One of my managers has taken ill unexpectedly with COVID-19 and had not made arrangements to provide another manager with access to their worklist on HRConnect in the event of their absence. How can I ensure that their staff will continue to have their leave arrangements, e.g. annual leave, special leave etc, managed?

You can update HRConnect with the details of the line manager who will assume responsibility for managing the absence of this group of staff. This will normally be their next line manager or in some instances, another manager within your team with the appropriate security clearance, where applicable.

To temporarily change the line manager to whom these staff report, log on to **HRConnect** and action **via Manager Self-Service, 'Other Manager Actions'** and select **'Change Line Manager'**. The new line manager will, from the date authority has been transferred to them, receive alerts for any new notifications. For more information please refer the step by step guidance, [Changing Line Manager Quick Reference Guide](#) .

Staff should be advised about this temporary arrangement and asked to bring any outstanding actions that require approval to the attention of the temporary manager.

ESSENTIAL WORKERS

1. What is an essential worker?

Each Department has assessed the essential functions and roles that are required to keep the country running during this time. Where this work absolutely cannot be done from home, essential workers are required to attend work while observing the social distancing measures in place for travelling to and from work and while in the workplace.

More information on social distancing can be found at [COVID-19 Information for the public](#)

In addition, further guidance on safety in the workplace can be found on the HSENI website [here](#)

Currently, NICS staff who are over 70, pregnant or who fall within the vulnerable category will not be considered essential workers and have already been advised they must stay at home, working from home where possible.

Where you have been advised that you are an essential worker whose work cannot be done at home, but you have a dependant that cannot be looked after by anyone else, (note if your dependant is a child this will include your child's school or an alternative school), you should notify your manager and provide evidence of your circumstances. This will include confirmation of the unavailability of a school place contrary to Education Authority guidelines. In this case, an alternative person will be identified to perform the essential role and you will continue to be paid while caring for your dependant. Your circumstances will be regularly reviewed by your line manager and it is essential that you keep in contact.

2. I have been designated as an essential worker, can my child attend school?

Yes, if your department has requested that you attend work, as your role has been deemed essential, you may send your child to school.

Whilst only one parent need be an essential worker, children should only attend school if they cannot be safely cared for at home.

If your child's school should request confirmation that you are an essential worker, the e-mail notification from your department that you are in an essential category should suffice.

3. Do I need confirmation from my employer that I am a key worker in order to send my child/children to school?

Children with at least one parent or carer who are identified as essential workers by the government can send their child/children to school. The purpose of opening schools is to ensure that essential workers can still attend their place of work and provide vital services. Some schools are seeking confirmation that a parent is an essential worker. The Department's e-mail notification to staff that they are in the essential category should suffice.

4. I have been advised I am an essential worker and am required to come into work, but I have concerns around my health and well-being.

If you have been advised by your Department that you are an essential worker, and your job can absolutely not be done from home, then you should follow government guidance to leave home and attend work in order to keep the country running. This currently does not apply to staff who are over 70, pregnant or who fall within the vulnerable category.

While you are at work, your business area should seek to take all steps to protect you in line with social distancing by:

- ensuring staff are sitting 2 metres apart
- putting in place rotas that are based on the absolute minimum numbers of staff required to deliver essential service/perform essential duties;
- putting working hours/patterns/shifts/ rotas in place that minimise time in the office and use of public transport; and
- the use of technology as much as possible to minimise time in office.

For further advice please see [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#)

In addition, further guidance on safety in the workplace can be found on the HSENI website [here](#)

5. What happens if an essential worker on my team has refused to attend work because of concerns for their health and well-being?

Should a member of your staff who is designated an essential worker by your department refuse to comply with a specific management request to attend work you should discuss with them their reasons for refusal and work with them to seek a solution. The Department may choose to treat this as unauthorised absence.

6. I have been told I am an essential worker but my role cannot be carried out from home however I have caring responsibilities, what should I do?

If you have been advised that you are an essential worker whose work cannot be done at home, you have exhausted your entitlement to the total of 15 days special leave to care for your dependent/s outlined above, and your dependent/s cannot be looked after by anyone else, you should notify your manager and provide evidence of your circumstances. It will be then be a decision for your manager/department how best to move forward given your particular circumstances. Matters relating to individual personal circumstances will be addressed on a case by case basis.

Your circumstances will be regularly reviewed by your line manager and it is essential that you keep in contact.

7. I am travelling for approved essential work reasons, do I need to take any special precautions now?

Yes, you should follow the online guidance published by the Public Health Agency (PHA) website www.publichealth.hscni.net.

8. I am an essential worker, however due to the nature of my work, homeworking is not an option for me. I am concerned about the availability and use of public transport?

If you are an essential worker and are using public transport, please remember to continue to practice social distancing measures and if possible vary your travel to avoid peak times.

If you experience difficulties due to travel disruption you could consider working from an office location closer to home (if possible).

If you should opt to take your car to work, please note that the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has suspended all on-street and off-street parking enforcement and on-street parking charges. However, you should be aware that DfI will continue to take action where illegal parking is unsafe or blocking access to emergency or essential services.

If you have any further concerns regarding the safety and reliability of public transport, please discuss this with your line manager.

9. I am currently working from home/an essential worker who is required to attend work and I had pre-booked annual leave. Can I still take this annual leave?

If you are working from home or in the office, you should speak to your manager about continuing to take the leave you had booked. If you are required to work by the business, or you do not wish to take the leave because of the travel and social distancing restrictions currently in place, you may ask your manager to cancel the period of booked annual leave and you will be allowed to take it at another time. Staff are encouraged to take annual leave to help ensure that they take an appropriate rest from work even if this must be confined to activities permissible within the current travel and social distancing instructions.

10. I am an essential worker and want to take time off during the week using annual/flexi leave. Am I able to work overtime on an evening or weekend?

At this challenging time we are keen to balance the need for staff to use annual/flexi leave during the week to have an appropriate break from work with requirements for additional resource availability for evening and weekend working. Where there is a business need for you to work overtime, your manager may consider giving approval for this in a week that you have taken annual/flexi leave.

ALLOCATION OF ALTERNATIVE DUTIES/WORK

1. My member of staff is currently working from home but is not currently in an essential role, I have asked that they carry out alternative essential duties/work. My member of staff is not happy with this request, what should I do?

During these exceptional circumstances it is for individual Departments to decide which areas of work are essential and to ensure that these areas of work are adequately resourced.

On this basis, if your member of staff's current role is not essential, then it is entirely reasonable and appropriate for you to ask them to carry out alternative essential duties/work, as long as you ensure that they continue to receive suitable direction, support, training and equipment as appropriate. If this is required it would be useful to put in place an agreed support/training plan.

If your member of staff can carry out these alternative essential duties/work, at home then they must do so. Where the alternative essential duties/work, absolutely cannot be done from home, they will be required to attend at the workplace to carry out essential work while observing the social distancing measures in place for travelling to and from work and while in the workplace.

It's important that if your member of staff has to attend the work place that you advise your Head of Branch of those arrangements. This will ensure and that the social distancing protocols for all staff that have to attend the work place to carry out essential work are met.

Should your member of your staff refuse to comply with a management request to carry out alternative essential duties/work, you should discuss this with them to better understand their reasons for refusal, in order to work with them to seek a solution. Your member of staff may also decide to involve their TUS representative to support them in these discussions.

It's important that all avenues to resolve points of disagreement are explored thoroughly by you and your member of staff. Where agreement cannot be reached or where a member of staff cannot provide an appropriate justification, the Department may choose to treat such an intentional refusal to carry out a reasonable management request as a disciplinary matter.

2. My line manager has asked me to carry out alternative essential duties/work which are/is not part of my regular duties, I am not happy with this arrangement, what should I do?

During these exceptional circumstances it is for individual Departments to decide which areas of work are essential and to ensure that these areas of work are adequately resourced.

On this basis, it is entirely reasonable and appropriate for your line manager to ask you to carry out alternative essential duties/work, as long as you continue to receive suitable direction, support, training and equipment as appropriate. You should discuss your training and support needs with your line manager and, if appropriate, agree a plan.

If you can carry out these alternative essential duties/work, at home then you must do so. Where the essential duties/work absolutely cannot be done from home, you will be required to attend at the workplace while observing the social distancing measures in place for travelling to and from work and while in the workplace.

If you believe you are unable to carry out these alternative essential duties/work, you should discuss your reasons and justification with your line manager so that they have a clear understanding of your reasons in order to work with you to seek a solution. You may involve your TUS representative to support you in these discussions.

Please see final paragraph of FAQ 1.

3. My member of staff's regular duties/work cannot be carried out at home and I have asked that they carry out alternative duties/work within the Department at home. My member of staff is not happy with this request, what should I do?

During these exceptional circumstances it is entirely reasonable and appropriate for you to ask a member of staff to carry out alternative duties/work, which can be undertaken at home as long as they continue to receive suitable direction, support, training and equipment as appropriate. If this is required it would be useful to put in place an agreed support/training plan.

It's important that if your member of staff has to attend the work place that you advise your Head of Branch of those arrangements. This will ensure and that the social distancing protocols for all staff that have to attend the work place to carry out essential work are met.

Should your member of staff refuse to comply with a management request to carry out alternative duties/work, you should discuss this with them to better understand their reasons for refusal, in order to work with them to seek a solution. Your member of staff may also decide to involve their TUS representative to support them in these discussions.

Please see final paragraph of FAQ 1.

4. My member of staff is currently undertaking regular duties/work at home, I have asked that they carry out alternative higher priority duties/work within the Department at home. My member of staff is not happy with this request, what should I do?

During these exceptional circumstances it is entirely reasonable and appropriate for you to ask a member of staff to carry out alternative duties/work which have been assessed as higher priority than those duties/work which they are currently undertaking at home, as long as they continue to receive suitable direction, support, training and equipment as appropriate. If this is required it would be useful to put in place an agreed support/training plan.

It's important that if your member of staff has to attend the work place that you advise your Head of Branch of those arrangements. This will ensure and that the social distancing protocols for all staff that have to attend the work place to carry out essential work are met.

Should your member of staff refuse to comply with a management request to carry out these alternative duties/work, you should discuss this with them to better understand their reasons for refusal, in order to work with them to seek a solution. Your member of staff may also decide to involve their TUS representative to support them in these discussions.

Please see final paragraph of FAQ 1.

5. My line manager has asked me to carry out alternative duties/work within the Department at home which are not part of my regular duties/work, I am not happy with this arrangement what should I do?

During these exceptional circumstances it is entirely reasonable and appropriate for your line manager to ask you to carry out alternative duties/work at home, as long as you continue to receive suitable direction, support, training and equipment as appropriate. You should discuss your training and support needs with your line manager and, if appropriate, agree a plan.

If you refuse to carry out alternative duties/work, you should discuss your reasons and justification with your line manager so that they have a clear understanding of your reasons in

order to work with you to seek a solution. You may involve your TUS representative to support you in these discussions.

Please see final paragraph of FAQ 1.

AGENCY WORKERS FAQs – CORONAVIRUS

Please note these temporary measures are in place during the exceptional circumstances. They will remain under review as the situation develops and may be withdrawn or amended ‘full pay or pay’ in these answers will mean your rate of pay and will be based on your contracted hours as set out in your assignment.

Any queries relating to these FAQs or the terms of your assignment should be raised with your recruitment agency contact in the first instance. If necessary, the recruitment agency will liaise with NICS HR if further guidance is required.

1. I have Coronavirus symptoms and am in self-isolation. What will I be paid?

You may already be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay from the first day of your illness. However, the NICS will instruct the recruitment agency to pay your full pay for the period you're self-isolating on medical advice.

2. I am self-isolating because someone in my household has Coronavirus symptoms. What will I be paid?

You may already be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay from the first day of your self-isolation. However, the NICS will instruct the recruitment agency to pay your full pay for the period you're self-isolating on medical advice.

3. I fall into the category of ‘extremely vulnerable’ and have been given medical advice to remain at home. What will happen to my pay?

If you fall into the category of ‘extremely vulnerable’, which is described by the Government advice, then you must stay in isolation. You may already be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay from the first day of your illness. However, the NICS will instruct the recruitment agency to pay your full pay.

4. I have dependants who are at home and require my care. What will happen to my pay if I remain at home to care for them?

You will be entitled to claim for some days Special Leave to help you arrange alternative arrangements for childcare. You should discuss this with your NICS manager and your recruitment agency contact.

Line managers should consider the advice regarding special leave set out in the FAQs for NICS staff and use that advice when considering request for special leave from agency workers.

If special leave cannot be permitted by the business area, then the matter should be raised with the recruitment agency for further consideration of whether the assignment should be ended or placed on hold and whether the agency can furlough the agency worker.

5. My work has asked me to remain at home as I am not an essential worker and cannot work from home. Will I still be paid?

If you are asked to remain at home because you are not an essential worker, the NICS will instruct the recruitment agency to pay your full pay. Please note that should vacancies arise

in an essential post, you may be redeployed or asked to work from home by your recruitment agency.

6. I have not completed my first 12 weeks of my assignment. What will I be paid if I have to self-isolate, am ill or have been told to stay at home?

If you are on the lower rate of pay within the first 12 weeks of your assignment, known as the pre-AWR rate, the NICS will instruct the recruitment agency to pay your full pay based on the pre-AWR rate.

7. How will my time sheets be approved if I am not in work or my manager is not in work?

Liaise with your NICS line manager, highlighting to them if your circumstances were different during the week.

Premiere People and Grafton recruitment agencies have supplied new timesheets for completion by line managers and these should now be used as instructed. Other agencies are continuing to use their existing timesheets. It is important to note there may be earlier than normal deadlines for submission of timesheets at present.

8. I am at home but available for work in an essential post if needed. Will I be redeployed to another assignment in the NICS?

If you are available for work in an essential post, and a post becomes available, you may be contacted by your recruitment agency to be redeployed. Contact your recruitment agency to make them aware of your availability and await a response from them.

9. I work in a non-departmental public body – do these terms apply to me?

These terms affect any agency worker on assignment to a Non-Departmental Public Body through the CPD Collaborative Framework for the Provision of Agency Workers.

10. I work in Education Authority/Further Education Colleges – do these terms apply to me?

If you work on assignment for the Education Authority or Further Education Colleges you should contact your recruitment agency for advice.

11. Who should I contact for further information?

For further information on any assignment related matter within the NICS or NDPB, you should contact your recruitment agency.

RESOURCING AND VACANCY MANAGEMENT

FAQS FOR STAFF

Q: I have an interview date scheduled for coming weeks, will this go ahead?

A: NICS HR have advised that during the current COVID-19 restrictions and until further notice, the majority of interviews have been temporarily suspended. HRConnect will contact you to let you know if your interview has been suspended.

Q: Will I be given a new interview date?

A: Yes. When the current COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, HRConnect will then arrange for you to be provided with a revised interview date, and as long as you are symptom-free and fit for work you should report for interview on the revised date

Q: When will I be notified about a rescheduled interview?

A: We currently do not have a timeframe for when interviews will be rescheduled to. However, as and when we are in a position to do so, HRConnect will contact you to advise of your rescheduled interview date.

Q: After COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, if I am due to report for an interview but am in the 'vulnerable' category and would wish to defer, how should I proceed?

A: If you are given a new interview date but wish to defer for a further period due to ongoing concerns around COVID-19, NICS HR will facilitate a deferred interview date.

Q: After COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, if my interview date is during my self-isolation period. Will I be given a new interview date?

A: Yes. If you are given a new interview date but you are in a period of self-isolation, you should advise HRConnect of when your period of self-isolation is due to end. HRConnect will then arrange for you to be provided with a revised interview date, and as long as you are symptom-free and fit for work you should report for interview on the revised date.

Q: If advice around the importance of social distancing is still applicable at that time of my interview, how will this be incorporated into my interview process?

A: Be assured that NICS HR and HRConnect will adhere to the Government advice at the time regarding social distancing. Where possible, interviews will be conducted via video/telephone. Where that is not possible, social distancing arrangements will be observed from how you will be greeted when you report for interview (e.g. no handshakes, two meter distance observed etc.) and in the layout of the interview room itself (e.g. appropriate distance between yourself and the panel, and between panel members.). If you have any specific concerns, please advise the member of HRConnect staff on duty at the time of your interview.

Q: I am currently in self-isolation, and my start date in my new branch coincides with my return to work date. Should I report to my current branch or new branch?

A: As long as you are fit for work and out of your 7/14 day self-isolation period (i.e. 7 days if living alone and 14 days if living with another person/s), and not required to return to your current branch to complete a hand over, then you should contact your new line manager to confirm that you can report to your new branch on the date agreed.

Given the evolving situation and the rate at which staff and managers are now homeworking, you are advised to contact your new manager in advance to check on reporting arrangements. HRConnect can assist as necessary.

Q: I have received an offer letter from HRConnect. Should I report on the start date given on the letter?

A: Given the evolving situation and the rate at which staff and managers are now homeworking, you are advised to contact your new manager in advance to check on reporting arrangements, but only if you are symptom-free and fit for work. HRConnect can assist you as necessary.

If there is any change in your health or circumstances prior to your given start date which means you are not able to report as agreed, then you should contact HRConnect as soon as possible. You will then be notified of a revised start date in due course.

Q: I have been told that my interview will go ahead as planned but although I do not have any symptoms nor have I been self-isolating, I have decided, due to the wider COVID-19 concerns, that I will not be attending the interview. Can I get a reconvened interview?

A: Please be assured that NICS HR and HRConnect will adhere to the Government advice at the time regarding social distancing, and this advice has now been incorporated into the processes in place for all scheduled interviews. However, if you have any specific concerns please contact HRConnect.

FAQS FOR MANAGERS

Q: I am a manager expecting a new member of staff (existing NICS officer) to arrive on an agreed start date. My team are all working from home, what should I do?

A: If you wish the new member of staff to start on the agreed date, for example to take up a business critical post, you should ensure that all necessary contingency measures are put in place, for example, taking into account the current COVID-19 restrictions, including the need for social distancing in the workplace, you may wish to consider whether the new start can report to another office for induction/training in the interim.

Alternatively, if you want to defer the start date, you should contact HRConnect as soon as possible.

Q: I am a manager expecting a new member of staff (recruited from external competition) to start on an agreed start date. My team are all working from home, what should I do?

A: NICS HR have identified all new starts due to start before the end of April. Vacancy Management teams will contact each of the LMs to see what alternative arrangements need to be made and in turn the new starts will be advised accordingly.

Q: I am a manager with a new vacancy. Should I declare this now and submit a Funding and Headcount form as usual?

A: Funding and Headcount forms should only be submitted to NICS HR for business critical vacancies.

As an initial consideration, you may wish to consider internal redeployment from within your branch/division using existing staff as an immediate interim measure.

Q: I have advertised to fill my vacancy via elective transfer and it is a pressing staffing need. Should I continue with informal discussions with the applicants?

A: For those already advertised on the Weekly Opportunities Bulletin, face to face informal discussions with applicants should only take place if social distancing arrangements can be ensured and with the agreement of candidates. Rather, line managers are encouraged to use Jabber or telephone or to suspend action temporarily.

The advertising of any new elective transfers will be suspended.

Q: Will there be consideration given to extend current live lists if business areas are not in a position to fill posts during this period of uncertainty?

A: These are unprecedented times and NICS HR will be as flexible, adaptable and responsive as possible. This will be considered on a case by case basis.

FAQS FOR PANEL MEMBERS

Q: I am due to be a panel member for a competition, but am now self-isolating. Who should I advise? Will the interviews be rescheduled?

A: You should contact your recruitment lead in HRConnect as soon as possible to advise them that you are not now able to sit as a panel member as previously arranged. HRConnect will liaise with NICS HR Resourcing on the best way forward, taking into account all information available at the time, and will then advise you on the status of the competition.

Q: I am due to sit as a panel member and, although symptom-free, I am concerned about participating on an interview panel given the current situation. Should I attend as arranged?

A: Please be assured that government advice regarding social distancing will be put in place for all scheduled interviews. However, if you have any specific concerns please contact your recruitment contact in HRConnect.

Q: Going forward, will there be other methods for interviewing if face to face is not suitable.

A: Where necessary, alternative arrangements, including video or telephone interviews can be considered.

Should you have a query which is not covered above, please send an email to NICSHR.Resourcing@finance-ni.gov.uk

In the subject field please indicate your department and Covid-19 query

COVID-19 & NICS PAY

1. Will I still get paid?

Yes, all NICS staff will continue to receive pay during the COVID emergency period.

NICS payroll is a key priority at this time. Monthly and weekly salaries/wages will continue to be processed as normal as far as possible taking account of the resources and systems available.

NICSHR is monitoring the changing position closely and employing measures to ensure the continuity of payroll. In the unlikely event that the normal payroll processing facilities are no longer available, a set of agreed contingency measures will be deployed.

The deployment of necessary contingency measures will result in the majority of staff receiving accurate pay, but, it is not possible to guarantee accurate pay in all circumstances.

In the event of significantly depleted resources within the HRConnect Shared Services Centre (SSC) to process pay normally, it will be necessary to prioritise payroll actions and this may mean that some pay elements are not included, for example some non-recurring elements, such as for example non-time based allowances and grade changes, either permanent or temporary.

In the very unlikely event of the loss of complete capability to process payroll, the 'worst case scenario' contingency measure will be to base salaries/wages on previous month/week payments. For many, this will result in over-payments or under-payments (for example the inclusion of overtime from the previous month or the non-payment of overtime worked).

During the contingency period, an extremely limited facility will be available to make arrangements to provide manual payments for exceptional cases of hardship where there is evidence that the salary/wage paid is significantly less than the **basic pay** entitlement for the pay period. This facility will not extend to payments not made, for whatever reason, where the payment issued was at least normal basic pay (e.g. overtime or a recent change of grade on promotion would not qualify for a manual payment).

Work is underway to ensure appropriate systems and processes are in place to regularise the position after return to normal operation, but it is likely that this will take some time. This means that overpayments will be automatically recovered when we return to normal operations and underpayments will also be corrected at that time on receipt of time-cards for overtime and claim forms for allowances.

2. Will my self-service timecards be approved and paid?

Where possible using self-service facility, Line Managers responsible for approving time cards should provide worklist access to other managers in their business area so that time cards can continue to be approved in the event of a manager's absence. The link below provides further guidance:

[Quick Reference Guide for Managers](#)

If it is not possible for a Line Manager to provide worklist access using self-service, HRConnect should **not** be contacted for this purpose.

Before submitting a timecard **please establish with your managerial hierarchy** who will approve it and that the relevant access to HR Connect is in place. In the event that your line manager is not available to authorise your time card, a line manager higher up the chain **can complete and submit** the time card.

While it remains possible for normal payroll processing to be supported, approved time card elements will be included in salaries/wages.

3. HRConnect Payroll Cut-Off Dates

During the emergency period, HRConnect ['cut off'](#) dates will be earlier to enable processing of pay with depleted resources.

In the very unlikely event of the loss of complete capability to process payroll, the 'worst case scenario' contingency measure will be to base salaries/wages on previous month/week payments. For many, this will result in over-payments and under-payments (for example the inclusion of overtime from the previous month or the non-payment of overtime worked in the current month).

During the contingency period, an extremely limited facility will be available to make arrangements to provide additional manual payments for exceptional cases of hardship where there is evidence that the salary/wage paid is less than the basic pay entitlement for the pay period. This facility will not extend to payments not made, for whatever reason, where the payment issued was at least normal basic pay (e.g. overtime or a recent change of grade on promotion would not qualify for a manual payment).

Work is underway to ensure appropriate systems and processes are in place to regularise the position after return to normal operation, but it is likely that this will take some time. This means that overpayments will be automatically recovered when we return to normal operations and underpayments will also be corrected at that time on receipt of time-cards for overtime and claim forms for allowances.

4. Will I receive a Pay Advice Slip and/or P60?

Due to the ongoing situation, the distribution of March and April pay advice slips was significantly disrupted. P60s for 2019/20 are now available. P60s, along with March and April payslips, were distributed to buildings which are currently open, on Thursday 14 May. Pay slips for May will also issue under these arrangements and this will apply until further notice.

Pay slips and P60s normally issued to home addresses will be issued to home addresses.

For those staff who have access to HR Connect self-service, March and April ePayslips are now available via the Employee Self-Service menu. Future ePayslips will be added each month. If you do not use HR Connect self-service (for example, if you are industrial or 'payroll only' staff) you will continue to get your pay advice slip as set out above.

If you are working from home or otherwise not in the office, you will not be able to routinely collect your P60 or printed pay advice slip due to the ongoing situation. This means that, in

light of the current PHA advice, you will only be able to collect them when you are next in the office on essential business.

If it is essential that you have your P60 or pay advice slip before then, and you do not have access to ePayslips, you should contact your line manager to establish how and when this could be arranged, for example by posting them out. You should not attend the office solely for the purpose of collecting P60s or pay advice slips.

NB: Pay advice slips that are normally delivered to TEO offices will at the Department's request be delivered to Stormont Castle. At DfE's request, all pay advice slips that go to Adelaide House, Killymeal House, Fermanagh House, Careers Service, Anne St and Consumer Affairs, Newtownbreda will be delivered to Netherleigh. At DoF's request, pay advice slips that normally go to Queens Court and Boaz House will be delivered to Lanyon Plaza, while those for Victoria Hall, will go to Centre House instead. At DfI's request, pay advice slips that normally go to DVA test Centres will be delivered to Corporation Street.

5. I am currently paid by cheque and this is posted to my office location?

Salary cheques for April which were being held by HRConnect awaiting validation of home address or bank details were posted to home addresses held on 14 May.

If you have not received your cheque please contact NICS HR immediately at NICSHR.PayandReward@finance-ni.gov.uk so the matter can be investigated. Future salary cheques will be issued to the home address held.

6. Will I continue to receive my salary/wage by cheque?

Where HRConnect services become significantly disrupted, it may not be possible to make payments by cheque. In recent weeks NICSHR has contacted all staff currently paid by cheque to, where possible, provide bank details so that payment can be guaranteed in the unlikely event of a 'worst case scenario' situation. If you have not received a communication from NICSHR to this effect, please contact HRConnect immediately to provide bank details. As they cannot take telephone calls from 15 April 2020 until further notice, please use the e-mail addresses below, including 'payroll query' in the subject line:

HRConnect contact details:

NICS (excluding DOJ/PPS)

Non-industrial Email: NICS@HRConnect.nigov.net

Industrial Email: Industrial@HRConnect.nigov.net

DOJ/PPS

Email: NIO@HRConnect.nigov.net

7. Can I stop or suspend my Childcare Voucher deductions?

For information regarding childcare vouchers, the Employers for [Childcare](#) website provides Covid-19 related information and confirms:

'employees may have the option to temporarily reduce the amount they pay into their Childcare Voucher account through your payroll. They may also have the opportunity to temporarily opt out of the voucher scheme, but it is a good idea to advise parents, if possible, to continue to make a small payment (even as little as £1 per month) into their account, which

they can then increase again in the future. If there are no contributions going into an employee's Childcare Voucher account for 52 weeks or more they will lose eligibility to the scheme.

Parents should also be reminded that, if it is affordable for them to do so, they have the option to continue to salary sacrifice their usual amount, and to allow this to **build up in their Childcare Voucher account** during a time when they do not need to pay for childcare. This means they will have a balance available to use when their childcare payments resume - this can be used to pay for all forms of registered childcare. **Employers For Childcare's Childcare Vouchers do not have an expiry date.'**

Normal payroll processing will continue to be maintained as far as possible but in the unlikely event that normal processing is significantly impacted, it will be necessary to prioritise payroll activities. Where possible such requests will be processed.

8. What will happen with the 2019 NICS pay award?

NICS HR made a formal offer to recognised trades unions on 18 March 2020. Ordinarily a bulletin would have issued to staff and unfortunately normal activity has been overtaken by the coronavirus situation.

At this stage, it is impossible to predict when progression and implementation of the 2019 Pay will be achievable but as soon as it is possible an update will be provided to staff.

9. Who do I contact if I have a query regarding my pay?

HRConnect continues to be the contact point for pay queries, however, they cannot take telephone calls from 15 April 2020 until further notice. For any pay queries please contact HRConnect via the e-mail addresses below, including 'payroll query' in the subject line:

NICS (excluding DOJ/PPS)

Non-industrial Email: NICS@HRConnect.nigov.net

Industrial Email: Industrial@HRConnect.nigov.net

DOJ/PPS

Email: NIO@HRConnect.nigov.net

10. I have not received all the payments I was expecting to receive this month/ week – who should I contact?

HRConnect continues to be your point of contact for pay queries (contact details above) but these are extraordinary times and staffing levels and access are impacted across all areas. If pay resources are adequate to address and correct the issue, any necessary correction of pay should be possible, but where resources are significantly impacted, it will be necessary to prioritise pay actions to deal with, for example, hardship cases where a member of staff has received significantly less than basic level of pay. All other inaccuracies will be corrected retrospectively when normal operations resume.

11. Can I get a refund for my Season Ticket (aLink)?

Translink have a refund policy in place for aLink card holders who are unable to travel to the workplace due to the Covid-19 situation i.e. working from home or self-isolating.

[Translink Covid-19 Refund Policy](#)

You should contact Translink, in the first instance, to discuss your request for a refund. Should Translink require written confirmation of your circumstances in order to process a refund, please complete the template below which should be signed by a Level 2 Line Manager (Staff Officer or above) and returned to Translink with a covering letter.

NICS Translink refund application

If you wish to cancel your aLink card completely you should write to Translink who will make the appropriate arrangements. To repay any outstanding monies please contact HRConnect as outlined at FAQ 9. Deductions will continue until you repay your outstanding balance to HRConnect.

Should you be currently working / returning to work on an alternative working pattern / rota arrangement, you may wish to reconsider your options for purchasing tickets. You should contact Translink for further information.

12. My Season Ticket (aLink) is due for renewal, what should I do?

You should contact Translink, in the first instance, to discuss your options for renewing your season ticket. If you decide to proceed with renewal you should send your signed completed application for advancement and a copy of your Translink quote to NICSHR.PayandReward@finance-ni.gov.uk. Payroll cut-off for July 2020 is 5pm on Tuesday 30 June; please allow time for processing by NICS HR when submitting your application.

13. How do I claim for additional hours/overtime hours worked?

Where possible claims for additional hours/overtime should be submitted via the HRConnect portal using the self-service facility. Line Managers responsible for approving overtime claims should provide worklist access to other managers in their business area so that overtime claims can continue to be approved in the event of a manager's absence. The link below provides further guidance:

[Step by Step Guide](#)

HOMEWORKING EXPENSES

Q1. I am currently working from home: is there a home working allowance available to cover additional heating and lighting costs at home?

A1. There is no home working allowance in the NICS, but some additional expenses incurred may be claimed as per the FAQs below.

HMRC publishes guidance about how to claim tax relief on any home-working expenses you incur. If you wish to investigate this option further, you should be able to find HMRC guidance online: the NICS cannot provide advice on personal tax matters.

Q2. I am currently working from home and I am required to make work calls. Will I be entitled to be reimbursed for these calls?

A2. In the first instance you should consider using Cisco Jabber. This will enable you to make most work calls at no cost to yourself or the Department. You can use either your own headphones with microphone or be provided with headsets, if available. Cisco Jabber will need to be enabled on your laptop or desktop if not already, and ITAssist will be able to provide guidance as necessary.

The Department may reimburse employees working at home for any actual cost incurred in the making of business calls on your personal mobile phone/home landline [see Question 3 below for details on how to claim.](#)

Q3. How do I claim for reimbursement of work calls made on my home landline or personal mobile phone, and what information must I provide my authorising officer with?

A3. In order to claim reimbursement you will be required to provide the following details along with your claim to your authorising officer:

1. Proof of the mobile phone package you are currently on identifying any limits to daily/monthly minute (calls) entitlement;
2. A copy of an itemised phone bill identifying any business calls made that exceed your monthly limits. These itemised bills can be redacted if so wished. This will identify the additional expense.

Once the additional expense has been identified you can then make a claim for reimbursement via Account NI - iExpenses. You must however be set up on the Account NI system in order to make any claim.

Q4. I am currently working from home due to Covid-19 and I am incurring additional data charges on my home broadband as a consequence, will I be entitled to be reimbursed for the additional data charges?

A4. The Department may reimburse you for the additional cost of increased broadband data charges incurred solely from working from home. Any claims will need to be accompanied with supporting information i.e. receipts as detailed at Question 6 below.

Q5. I am currently working from home due to Covid-19 but do not have home broadband, can I get broadband installed for home working, and can I be reimbursed for the installation and monthly tariffs?

A5. Prior to agreeing to the installation of home broadband, you and your line management should consider alternatives, such as providing a Data Sim for laptops or Mifi device for desktop computers. ITAssist will be able to provide guidance if necessary on the procedure to be followed.

The Department may reimburse the additional cost of installing broadband at home and monthly tariffs and on the basis the charges incurred are solely related to working from home.

Q6. How do I claim for reimbursement of additional home broadband or installation of broadband at home and monthly tariffs required solely for work purposes, and what information must I provide my authorising officer with?

In order to do claim reimbursement you will be required to provide the following details along with your claim to your authorising officer:

1. Receipts indicating the cost of installation and details of the monthly data tariff
2. Proof of the broadband package you are currently on identifying your current limits; and details from the provider of the cost of expanding these limits due to work requirements.

Once the additional expense has been identified you can then make a claim for reimbursement via Account NI - iExpenses. You must however be set up on the Account NI system in order to make any claim.

Q7. Will there be any tax liabilities in respect of the reimbursements detailed above?

A7. Whilst there is no liability for either the employer or employee to pay tax on the amount reimbursed, HMRC indicates that "if an employee uses their own mobile phone/broadband and receives reimbursement of calls or increased broadband data made over their monthly tariff or installation of broadband for business purposes, this must be reported on a P11D form" as this is considered by HMRC as a 'benefit in kind'. Departments will be required to keep records of any reimbursements made to staff to assist their Finance Teams to complete a separate P11D form for each employee who receives reimbursement of phone calls/broadband data etc. This would increase the employee's taxable pay slightly.

Q8. What is the process for claiming the reimbursements detailed above?

A8. Please follow the guidance provided by Account NI and detailed in the [iExpenses Walkthrough](#) which can be found on the Employee Services Portal (ESP). Pages 5 - 18 shows a step by step example of how to make a claim and can guide you through the process.

NB: As there isn't a drop down expense type for Business Calls on the Account NI 'Expense Reports' please select '**Miscellaneous T&S Expenses**' on the drop down for 'Expense Type' under 'Receipt Based Claims'

Further information for "Staff New to or Leaving the Account NI Systems" can be found [here](#).

Q9. If I am not set up on the Account NI system to claim the reimbursements detailed above, how do I go about getting set up?

- A9. If you need to claim for expenses and you are not already set up on Account NI you will need to submit a [DM100 Employee Maintenance form](#) to provide Account NI with your personal and work details. When completing the form, please complete each field before moving to the next one as the options selected from the dropdowns will have an impact on the next fields and dropdown lists available.

The [DM100 Employee Maintenance form](#) must be authorised by the approver of your iExpenses claims.

Approvers must be Staff Officer Grade or above, and must be at least one grade above the claimant. The forms should be sent from the approver's mailbox to forms@accountni.gov.uk. The email must come from the approver's mailbox for audit purposes (it is not sufficient for the approver to be CC'd into emails).

Once the forms have been submitted to forms@accountni.gov.uk they will be processed within 3 working days. You should then be able to access T&S User responsibility by logging onto the Account NI portal (your username will be your payroll number. A password will be provided to you once forms have been processed if you are on the DOI network. Alternatively please use your single sign on password).

Once you have logged on you will see a button on the left hand side of the portal, "Oracle E-Business Suite." Select this and you will be brought to a navigator tool bar. Click on "T&S User" and then "Expenses Home." You will now be at your iExpenses home page where you can enter and review any claims you have. If you are still unable to access "T&S User" after submitting your form you should contact Account NI Service Desk on ext.133 (0845 671 3133). Please allow sufficient time before contacting the Service Desk as AccNI's usual response times of 3 working days may have increased in the current climate.

(Details taken from [How do I get set up for iExpenses to claim travel and subsistence?](#))