

# Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

## COVID-19

### Information for Employers and Employees

#### ***Introduction***

The Government has announced a package of measures with the main objective being to limit and slow down the spread of Covid-19, to keep the number of affected people to a minimum and to reduce peak pressure on the health service.

This package included €2.4 billion for income support to fund an enhancement of State illness payments for people affected by Covid-19. The special measures include:

- Eliminating the current 6 day 'waiting period' and bringing forward payment of benefits to cover the first week of any absence in respect of medically required cases of self-isolation or medically diagnosed cases of Covid-19.
- Increasing the personal rate of Illness Benefit from €203 per week to €305 per week for a maximum period of two weeks of medically required self-isolation, or for the duration of a person's medically-certified absence from work due to a confirmed diagnosis of Covid-19.
- Changing the normal social insurance conditionality requirements for access to Illness Benefit for employed people including self-employed people *and/or* removing the means test requirement for Supplementary Welfare Allowance in cases of Covid-19 illness or medically certified self-isolation. This will enable self-employed people or other workers who do not have the necessary social insurance history to receive the increased payment without having to undergo a means-test.

These enhancements to the benefits available to workers suffering from Covid-19 or self-isolating due to Covid-19 reflect the outcome of discussions with key employer and trade union representative bodies. Employer and trade union bodies, jointly with

Government have now urged all employers to support national public health objectives by continuing, as a minimum, to pay employees who cannot attend work due to Covid-19 illness or self-isolation the difference between the special Illness Benefit rate and their normal wages.

The purpose of this notice is to outline the social welfare income supports that are available to assist any employees who may be required to take time off work. Information concerning employment rights is available at the Workplace Relations Commission website [www.workplacerelations.ie](http://www.workplacerelations.ie).

In considering how to respond to questions arising as a consequence of Covid-19 employers and employees are directed in the first instance to the public health advice issued by the HSE, available on their website [www.HSE.ie](http://www.HSE.ie). It is essential that all individuals and employers abide by this advice.

### ***Who the enhanced arrangements are intended to serve***

The enhanced arrangements are intended to reduce the financial loss incurred by workers, - employed and self-employed people - who are not adequately covered by occupational sick pay arrangements.

People who

- work in the civil and public sector do not need to apply for Covid-19 related illness benefit as separate special leave arrangements have already been made
- are already in receipt of a welfare payment, including people engaged on state employment programmes such as CE and Tus or engaged in funded training and education programmes, do not need to apply – their existing payment will continue to be paid if they are affected by Covid-19.

### ***Workers who are diagnosed with COVID-19***

Where an employee or a self-employed person is **medically required** to self-isolate or has been diagnosed with Covid-19 they can apply for the special, enhanced, Illness Benefit payment. In the interests of public health, this payment will only be paid where individuals **remain confined to their home or a medical facility** while in receipt of this special Illness Benefit. The personal rate of this payment has been increased to €305 as compared with the normal personal rate of €203.

The standard increases payable in respect of adult and child dependents will continue to be paid. Standard payment rates for Illness Benefit are available [here](#).

- Illness Benefit applications can be made via post. Forms are available at Intreo centres and at GP surgeries or can be ordered by telephone from the Department at 1890 800 024. an online application is being developed and should be available by the end of the month.
- As per the HSE advice, **people with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 should not attend their GP surgery or their Intreo office in person** and should instead contact their GP by phone or phone 999 or 112.

### ***Workers who are not diagnosed with COVID-19 but who are required to self-isolate***

A person who is **medically required to self-isolate** in accordance with the up-to-date guidelines from the HSE may apply for the special Illness Benefit payment. This will be paid for a maximum period of two weeks self-isolation and will only be paid where individuals **remain confined to their home or a medical facility** while in receipt of this special Illness Benefit.

### **Conditions for Covid-19 Illness Benefit**

Remember if you are applying for a COVID-19 Illness Benefit payment you;

- Must have been diagnosed with Covid19 or must satisfy the conditions for self-isolation specified in public health advice;

- Must be absent from work and confined to home or a treatment location;
- Must not be performing any work;
- Must have been in paid employment immediately prior to claim; and
- Must submit, on request, evidence of employment, earnings and absence from work.

***Workers whose employers do not supplement/top-up the State Illness Benefit payment***

Workers, in receipt of the enhanced illness benefit payment who still face financial distress because their employer fails to pay sick pay beyond the level paid by the State, can apply for additional emergency income support, in the form of **Supplementary Welfare Allowance (based on a means test)** - details available [here](#).

Applications are usually made in person, normally when a person is no longer confined to their home. People who require immediate support and cannot attend an Intreo Centre can phone 1890 800 024 or 01 2481398 between 9.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday.

***Availability of the enhanced payment***

The implementation of these enhancements requires legislation by the Oireachtas and changes to application and payment systems within the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. It is hoped that this process can be completed by the end of March.

The new payment rates will become effective from 9 March and workers will be entitled to a refund of any arrears due from this date.

### ***Workers who are requested to stay at home by their employer***

Employers are requested to follow public health advice and should not ask staff to stay away from work except in accordance with this advice. Where employers send staff home in circumstances where they are not advised to do so it is expected that they will continue to pay staff as normal.

Any worker, who is not advised to self-isolate in accordance with the up-to-date guidelines of the HSE, but is requested to stay at home by their employer as a precaution against the spread of Covid-19 will, in situations where the employer cannot continue to pay their wages, be considered to have been temporarily laid-off and can apply for an income support in the form of a **Jobseeker Payment** or **Supplementary Welfare Allowance**.

### ***Workers who are laid off temporarily or put on to short time working***

Employees who are laid off temporarily, without pay, due to a reduction in business activity, can apply for a **Jobseeker payment**. This application can be made online at [www.mywelfare.ie](http://www.mywelfare.ie) or in person at an Intreo centre.

Employees who are put onto short-time working by their employer due to a reduction in business activity related to Covid-19 may apply for a **Short Time Work Support** payment – information on this is available [here](#). This application can be made in person at an Intreo centre.

### ***Workers who need to take-time off work to care for a person affected by COVID-19***

Many employers can, and do, agree compassionate leave arrangements with staff who need to take short periods of time off to care for another person. These include arrangements to enable employees to work remotely from home, to alter shift-patterns, to work-up time taken, to rearrange parental leave or to bring forward annual leave entitlements from future work-periods. Where it is not possible to make

appropriate compassionate leave arrangements, employees can call on some statutory entitlements.

- An employee is entitled to paid leave, known as '**force majeure leave**', where they are urgently required to attend to the needs of a person who is affected by an illness or injury, including an actual or probable case of Covid-19. The person to whom care is being provided must be an immediate family relative<sup>1</sup> or a person who is in a relationship of domestic dependency with the employee. It is limited to a total of 3 days in a 12 month period or 5 days in a 36 month period. In the exceptional circumstances of Covid-19 is expected that employers will, if at all possible, facilitate people by allowing them to take the full 5 days entitlement in one block, as required.
- Parents are entitled, with 6 weeks' notice, to take up to 22 weeks unpaid **parental leave** to care for each child up to 12 years of age (16 years of age in the case of a child with a disability).
- Parents are also entitled, with 6 weeks' notice, to take **parents leave** of 2 weeks for each child under 1 year of age born on or after the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019. Parents taking parents leave are eligible to apply for **Parents Benefit** from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Information on the scheme is available [here](#) and applications can be made online at [www.mywelfare.ie](http://www.mywelfare.ie) or by post.
- Employers are free to waive notice periods for parental/parents leave or to agree to provide paid leave as an alternative to parental/parents leave. Employers can also agree alternative leave/absence arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of force majeure an immediate family relative means a child, a spouse, brother, sister, parent or grandparent.

### ***People already in receipt of Social Welfare Payments***

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is making the necessary preparations to ensure that there will be no disruption to welfare payments.

People currently in receipt of a welfare payment will continue to receive this payment in accordance with their current entitlements if they are required to self-isolate or are diagnosed with Covid-19. There is no need for the people concerned to take any action.

Payments to people who collect their payments in person at post offices but, due to illness or self-isolation, are unable to do so on the due date, will be held over until they can next attend a post office.

Alternative payment arrangements (e.g. transfer into a bank account, collection by an agent) are also available and can be agreed, on request, with any person who is affected by Covid-19.

### **How to apply for Illness Benefit for Covid-19 absences**

#### *Step 1*

If you feel you may be suffering from a Covid-19 illness or may need to self-isolate you should contact your GP by telephone.

If the GP is satisfied that you have Covid-19 or that, based on public health guidelines, you are a probable source of infection and should self-isolate, they will advise you accordingly.

The GP will then complete a medical certificate on your behalf and send this directly to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. You will need to provide your GP with your name, PPS number and date of birth so that this certificate can be associated with a payment in your name.

## *Step 2*

You now need to complete an application form for Illness Benefit (Form IB 1). There are three ways that you can get an application form/make an application.

### ***By phone***

You can call 1890 800 204 or 01 2481398 between 9.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday to get an application form by post.

### ***Organise to collect paper application form***

Ask a friend or family member to pick up an application form for you at:

- your GP's surgery;
- a local Intreo Centre – **link to Intreo Centres** [here](#)

***If you have been medically certified to self-isolate or are diagnosed with Covid-19 do not attend your GP or Intreo Centre.***

### ***Online***

An online application process will be available by the end of March.

Part 5 of the form relates to how you wish to be paid and it is therefore important that you provide us with the relevant details.

You do not need to complete Part 7 of this form (it relates to work related injury).

You should complete the form carefully to ensure a quick and efficient payment. You do not need to stamp the envelope. Send your application form by Freepost to Social Welfare Services, PO Box 1650, Dublin 1.

## *Step 3*

Once both the application form and the medical certificate are received payment will be processed.

## *Step 4*

You should continue to liaise with your doctor in relation to your diagnosis and the length of time you are medically certified unfit to work because of Covid-19.

#### *Step 5*

In order that we can process all payments as quickly as possible, we would kindly ask you not to phone the Department seeking updates on your application as staff will be focusing on processing applications. Thank you for your co-operation.

#### **Finally...**

- As the Covid-19 situation evolves, the Department is committed to providing information and updates, and recommends that you check this page and the [Department's twitter](#) account.
- Comprehensive information on employment rights and social welfare issues is also available on the Citizen's Information Board [website](#). Employment rights information is also available at the Workplace Relations Commission [website](#).
- Please also continue to check the [HSE website](#) for up to date Covid-19 health information.