This guidance has been produced by the Money Advice Unit of Hertfordshire County Council to explain recent changes to benefits, introduced in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We have tried to ensure this information is correct at the time of writing (April 26th 2021). We will continue to regularly update this information. Check for the latest version on www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/benefits

Key measures announced in the 2021 Budget:

- the Universal Credit £20.00 per week ‘uplift’ being extended until September 30th 2021

- a one-off payment of £500 made to those getting Working Tax Credit

- an extension of the existing Job Retention Scheme for furloughed workers

- an extension to the Self-employed Income Support Scheme

- the period over which Universal Credit Advance Payments are recovered extended from 12 months to 24 months as of April 6th 2021

- a delay of the return of the ‘Minimum Income Floor’ under Universal Credit until at least June 2021

- a delay until March 2022 of the return to the original ‘Surplus Earnings Rule’ under Universal Credit

- the maximum debt deduction rate for Universal Credit (and other benefits) reduced from 30% to 25% from April 2021

More information on the following pages.................................

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Every effort has been made to provide accurate information but this factsheet is for guidance only. It should not be considered an authoritative statement of the law.

Help and advice

For the full range of Money Advice Unit leaflets and factsheets, see www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/benefits. There is also a free short on-line training course on Universal Credit and a self-service benefit calculator available on www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/benefits

Citizens Advice offers free advice about benefits, housing, debt, employment rights, consumer rights and immigration issues. Many are closed to visitors due to the current COVID-19 measures but are operating a telephone advice service. 03444 111 444 www.hcas.org.uk and www.citizensadvice.org.uk/

Debt advice

These organisations offer free, independent advice to people who are experiencing difficulties:

National Debtline 0808 808 4000. www.nationaldebttline.org

Stepchange 0800 138 1111 www.stepchange.org

Breathing Space – this is a new service which people in debt (rent arrears, fuel bills, consumer debt etc) can access via money advisers, such as those employed by local Citizens Advice. It freezes debt recovery action whilst a person gets support to manage their debts, and there is an additional scheme for people with a mental health condition. See National Housing Federation - New statutory ‘breathing space’ scheme to help people in problem debt

Jobcentre Plus

JobCentres are now re-opening but access is limited, with members of the public should only attend if invited or directed to do so. DWP’s Visiting Service has suspended all routine face-to-face home visits but will be prioritising visits for customers who are most vulnerable, after a risk assessment in each case.

A new Redundancy area has been set up on the DWP’s Employment and Benefits Support website. It brings together information and advice for people who have been made redundant or who are at risk of it.

Don’t call us we’ll call you

People making new claims for Universal Credit no longer need to call the DWP as part of the process. Instead a bolstered frontline team will proactively call claimants if they need to check any of the information provided as part of the claim, as well as messaging them on their online journal to confirm details.
In addition, people applying for universal credit will now be able to use any existing Government Gateway account to confirm their identity.

Anyone who is unable to get online can still call the DWP as normal.

Support for workers sick, self-isolating, unemployed or furloughed (laid-off)

**Coronavirus (COVID-19): what to do if you're employed and cannot work**

Guidance for people who are employed and cannot work due to coronavirus (COVID-19) has been updated to include that your employer can furlough you if you’re shielding or have caring responsibilities because of coronavirus (COVID-19).

**£500 Test and Trace Support Payment**

To be eligible for a Test and Trace Support Payment, you must:
- have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace either because you’ve tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- be employed or self-employed;
- be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- be currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

In addition, parents and carers of children (under 16) who have been advised to self-isolate by their education setting or by NHS Test and Trace are now able to apply for a Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary payment of £500, if they meet the eligibility criteria.

Nurseries, childminders and other education settings are required to provide a letter to all parents or carers of the children advised to self-isolate, to support their application to the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme. A template letter is available for early years and primary schools on the primary schools document sharing platform titled with the code RP81.

Payments are administered in Hertfordshire by District and Borough Councils (see below). The scheme is running until at least June 30th 2021. To get more details, see Public Health England guidance - Stay at home guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection

<table>
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**The Job Retention Scheme**


If an employer is unable to cover staff costs due to COVID-19, they are able to access financial support from the government to avoid having to make redundancies. They have to classify one or more of their employees as ‘furloughed workers’. This means the workers are kept on the payroll.

The employer can claim a grant of up to 80% of the employee’s wages and staff costs, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month per employee. The employer can choose to use this scheme and also choose whether to fund the difference between this payment and the employee’s salary or not.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been extended until 30 September 2021. [Find out more about how the scheme is changing](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-jobs-retention-scheme).

Claims for furlough days in February 2021 had to be made by 15 March 2021. For periods ending on or before 30 April 2021, employers can claim for employees who were employed on 30 October 2020, as long as they have made a PAYE RTI submission to HMRC between the 20 March 2020 and 30 October 2020, notifying a payment of earnings for that employee.

For periods starting on or after 1 May 2021, employers can claim for employees who were employed on 2 March 2021, as long as they have made a PAYE Real Time Information (RTI) submission to HMRC between 20 March 2020 and 2 March 2021, notifying a payment of earnings for that employee. They do not need to have previously claimed for an employee before the 2 March 2021 to claim for periods starting on or after 1 May 2021.

For periods ending on or before 30 June 2021 employers can claim 80% of an employee’s usual salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. From 1 July 2021, the level of grant will be reduced each month and employers will be asked to contribute towards the cost of their furloughed employees’ wages.
From 1 July 2021, the grant will cover 70% of wages and employers will be required to top up an additional 10%. From 1 August the grant will cover 60% of wages and employers will be required to top up 20%.

HMRC has updated its guidance on which employees you can put on furlough and claim for through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, especially for employees unable to work because they have caring responsibilities.

The government will pay employees’ wages through the scheme if a business is forced to temporarily close because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Where an employee has been furloughed, they are permitted to work for another employer, if contractually allowed, and this will not affect the grant that they can claim under the Scheme.

Employers can:

- fully furlough employees – they cannot undertake any work for the employer while furloughed full time
- flexibly furlough employees – they can work for any amount of time, and any work pattern but they cannot do any work during hours that the employer records them as being on furlough

**Coronavirus (COVID-19) Job Retention and Sick Pay Rebate Schemes: New video guides**

HMRC has launched new videos about the support available to help employers deal with the economic impacts of coronavirus.

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) Job Retention Scheme
- Sick Pay Rebate Schemes

The public can report fraud to HMRC if they have evidence to suggest an employer on the list is abusing the scheme.

Several guidance notes related to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme have been updated:


There is also a set of FAQs: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme from the House of Commons Library.

The DWP guidance for people who were employed and have lost their job and guidance for people who are employed and cannot work due to coronavirus has been updated.
JETS - new employment programme to support those left jobless due to COVID-19

Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS) will target certain universal credit and JSA claimants who have been out of work for at least 13 weeks. JETS will provide intensive employment support to universal credit claimants in the 'All Work-related Requirements' group and New Style JSA claimants who have been unemployed for at least 13 weeks.

People receiving direct payments

Guidance has been published for people who buy care and support through a direct payment in order to know how and when they can use the CJRS to furlough employees. [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-people-receiving-direct-payments](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-people-receiving-direct-payments)

Winter Grant Scheme/Local Grant Scheme

The WGS scheme provided help with food costs for families over the Christmas, February and Easter school holidays, as well as other financial help at the discretion of the County Council (which can include help with fuel and help for people without children). It ended on April 16th A new Local Grant Scheme has replaced, also administered by the County Council.

The Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

SEISS initially allowed self-employed people to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of their trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month for 3 months.

On 3 March 2021 the Chancellor announced the SEISS would be extended until the end of September 2021.

The new grant will be set at 80% of 3 months’ average trading profits, paid out in a single instalment, capped at £7,500. Unlike earlier SEISS grants, the grant will take into account 2019 to 2020 tax returns and will be open to those who became self-employed in tax year 2019 to 2020. The online claims service for the grant will be available from late April 2021 until 31 May 2021.

A further grant is to cover May to September, and the size of the grant is to be determined, in part, by the amount a claimant’s turnover has reduced in the year April 2020 to April 2021. The grant will be worth:

- 80% of 3 months’ average trading profits, capped at £7,500, for those with a turnover reduction of 30% or more
- 30% of 3 months’ average trading profits, capped at £2,850, for those with a turnover reduction of less than 30%.

Applications for this final grant are to be opened from late July.

For full details see [Coronavirus: Self-Employment Income Support Scheme - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk)](https://www.parliament.uk)
Self-employed people, whose capital and current income is low enough, may also be able to claim Universal Credit and/or a Council Tax Reduction whilst waiting for payment and won’t have to repay any of the benefit received when SEISS payments are received. The Entitled To benefits calculator also enables people to see how any SEISS grant will affect future UC payments as well, due to something called the ‘surplus earnings rule’. This applies where a universal credit claimant has an increase in their earned income that takes them outside of entitlement to universal credit by more than £2,500. Earnings above this level can reduce subsequent entitlement, not just in the month it is received.

The DWP have confirmed that anyone getting a payment from the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLS), which enabled smaller businesses to access finance during the coronavirus outbreak, will have that loan treated as a business asset so it will not affect any means-tested benefits as either income or personal capital.

Self-employed people who are sick or self-isolating may be able to claim certain benefits. Please see the information on the following pages and the DWP’s guidance for people who are self-employed and getting less work or no work because of coronavirus (COVID-19) which has been updated to clarify eligibility conditions for Universal Credit and New Style Employment and Support Allowance, Pension Credit, New Style Jobseeker’s Allowance and the Test and Trace Support Payment as other financial help that can be claimed.

New HMRC helpline 0800 024 1222

This is for people who run businesses or are self-employed and are affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Welfare benefits information

| To use a self-service calculator that helps you work out benefit entitlement go to www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/benefits |


Benefits fall into 4 main categories – employer-paid; contribution-based; circumstances-based and means-tested.

A new claimant needs to check through those in order:

- can they get an employer-based benefit such as statutory sick pay?
- can they get a contributory benefit such as employment and support allowance or jobseekers allowance?
- are they due any circumstances-based benefit such as child benefit, carers allowance or personal independence payment?
- finally, if they don’t get the above, or those aren’t enough to live on, can they get means-tested help such as universal credit or council tax support?
See the MAU webpages for further information on all of the above –
www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/benefits

Also see DWP guide:
Get help with benefits and pensions if you have accessibility needs

DWP Benefits information is also now available via WhatsApp by sending ‘Hi’ in a
WhatsApp message to 07860 064 422.

DWP have produced a range of BSL videos on coronavirus and benefit changes.
These include new content for Universal Credit and Statutory Sick Pay. You can
view these videos on the DWP YouTube Sign channel.

**April 2021 benefit rates**

State pensions rose by 2.5 per cent so the full rate of the new state pension is
£179.60 per week. The standard minimum guarantee in pension credit also
increased by the same cash amount as the basic state pension, rising by 1.9 per
cent.

All other benefits rose by 0.5 per cent. This includes working-age benefits, benefits
to help with additional needs arising from disability, carers' benefits, pensioner
premiums in income-related benefits, statutory payments, and additional state
pension.'

The increase in local housing allowance rates - introduced at the start of the
coronavirus pandemic - was frozen in cash terms from April 2021.

The uprating of tax credits, child benefit and guardian's allowance took place on 6th
April for tax credits and 12th April for child benefit and guardian's allowance. The
majority of elements in working tax credit and child tax credit increased by 0.5 per
cent as did child benefit and guardian's allowance.

The £20 per week (£86.67 per month) increase in the universal credit standard
allowance will continue until October 1st 2021. People on working tax credit are to get
a £500 one-off payment in April 2021 as their equivalent payment.

The Benefit and pension rates 2021 to 2022 are here.

**If you need to self-isolate or cannot attend work due to coronavirus**

On January 5th 2021 the Government published guidance for employers and their
employees or workers who may not be able to go into work because they're self-
isolating and they're clinically extremely vulnerable. The guidance sets out the
relevant legal framework around absence and the return to work.
Statutory sick pay (SSP)

Employees who are too ill to work, or who are following government guidance to self-isolate, may be eligible for SSP from their employer, unless the employer has a more generous scheme in place. The amount is £96.35 p.w. from April 2021, but the employer may top this up with contractual sick pay. SSP can be paid for up to 28 weeks.

An employee on SSP may also top up their income by claiming universal credit.

Statutory Sick SSP over the qualifying period must be £120 per week or more to qualify. Someone can still qualify if they only recently started work and have not received 8 weeks’ pay yet. To check entitlement, visit www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay

If an employee wishes to dispute a decision to refuse SSP, they should contact the Statutory Payments Disputes Team: 03000 560630.

SSP is paid from the first day a person is sick with COVID-19 or self-isolating. The 3 “waiting days” are abolished but not for anyone claiming SSP for any other reason.

A person is classed as self-isolating if they:

- have symptoms of COVID-19 and have used the NHS111 online service and
- they have been told by a healthcare professional they have symptoms of COVID-19
- or they live with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19 and the above applies
- A person who has been notified that they have had contact with a person with coronavirus (COVID-19) is also eligible if they are self-isolating, for 14 days from the latest date on which that contact occurred, or a date specified in the latest notification.
- Individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable are no longer required to shield. This means those who are unable to work from home but can work on site can do so, providing the workplace is COVID-safe. Individuals will no longer be eligible for SSP on the basis of being clinically extremely vulnerable. If shielding guidance is reintroduced, either in the case of local lockdowns or nationally, and individuals receive a notification advising them to shield, they will be eligible to receive SSP again if they meet all eligibility criteria.

An employee does not have to provide a fit note for the first 7 days of sickness or self-isolation. After 7 days, people with COVID-19 symptoms and people who are self-isolating can get an isolation note online at which they can send to their employer.

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

For details see Gov.uk’s employment and support allowance guidance. Universal Credit claimants should now apply for New Style Employment and Support Allowance online or by phone instead of through their online account.
Workers, who are sick or self-isolating, and whose earnings are insufficient to qualify for SSP, may be entitled to new style ESA, if they have worked enough and paid, or been credited with, sufficient national insurance contributions. Self-employed people, who cannot claim SSP, may be due ESA instead.

At present, people ‘affected by COVID-19’ do not have to serve 7 waiting days before they can be paid ESA. The regulations state that a person is affected by coronavirus disease (COVID-19) if they are:

- infected or contaminated with coronavirus disease or
- in isolation (because they have been advised to isolate by NHS 111 Online) or
- caring for a child or qualifying young person who is a member of the person’s household and who is in isolation or infected with coronavirus disease

Regulations treating ESA claimants affected by Covid-19 as having limited capability for work without being required to provide medical evidence or undergo a work capability assessment, and removing the need for waiting days, have been extended by six months to 12 November 2021.

The [New Style Employment and Support Allowance detailed guide](https://www.gov.uk) on Gov.uk has been updated to include details of the evidence customers will need to provide if they are claiming New Style Employment and Support Allowance because of coronavirus

**New-style (or contributory) jobseeker’s allowance (JSA) and universal credit (UC) if looking for work**

From 30 March 2020, jobseekers didn’t have to look for work or be available to start work. However, the DWP have reintroduced the requirement for claimants of universal credit, new-style and legacy jobseeker’s allowance to accept a claimant commitment as part of any new claim, to “provide tailored support to help them find work or increase hours.” Claimant commitments must be reasonable for the ‘new normal’, acknowledging the reality of a person’s local jobs market and personal circumstances to prepare them for getting back into work.

JSA claimants can normally have up to two 2-week periods of sickness and one 13-week extended period of sickness within any 12-month period, before losing entitlement to JSA. From 30 March 2020, and until August 31st 2021, these sickness periods do not include any time when a claimant is infected with COVID-19, in isolation, or caring for a child or qualifying young person who is a member of the claimant’s household.

**Child benefit (CB)**

If you did not claim CB in the past because you or your partner earned over £50,000 and did not want to be taxed on it, you can revoke that decision if your income has now fallen. Call 0300 200 3100.
HMRC has announced that parents of new-borns can claim child benefit without registering the birth if General Register Offices are closed as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. First-time parents will need to fill in Child Benefit Claim form CH2 and send it to the Child Benefit Office and should add a note to the claim if they have been unable to register the birth because of COVID-19. If people are already in receipt of child benefit, they can complete the form or add their new-born’s details over the phone on 0300 200 3100.

**Free prescriptions etc**

The NHS has suspended the need for patients to sign prescription, dental and ophthalmic forms for a period of 5 months to 31 June 2021.

**Carer’s Allowance (CA)**

Carers retain their entitlement to CA during any temporary break in caring as a result of isolation due to infection or contamination with coronavirus, whether this applies to the carer or the person being cared for. This applies until 31st August 2021. The support can also be being provided by non-contact means e.g. phone or social media. Any payments received from the Job Support or SEIS schemes will be counted as earnings for carers allowance purposes.

**Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance**

In updated Medical guidance for DLA decision-makers (child cases) issued in April 2021, the DWP includes guidance for the first time on post-Covid syndrome (Long Covid), advising that for children who remain unwell after the usual three to four week recovery period for Covid-19 –

'It is those children who have significant functional impairment at 12 weeks and do not seem to be recovering, who may have entitlement to DLA Child. Always consider the qualifying period and prospective test when assessing needs in a claim for DLA Child. A child does not have to have had a positive test result to be diagnosed with the syndrome.'

Personal independence payment (PIP) claimants now have up to 3 months to return their PIP2 claim form after they have made their initial phone call to start the claim. Face-to-face assessments for all sickness and disability benefits have been temporarily suspended. Assessments for new claims will either be paper-based, conducted over the phone, or by re-introduced face to face assessments.

Almost all other reassessments were postponed in April 2020 for at least 6 months, and many claims have been extended again, until later in 2021. Reviews of existing Attendance Allowance and DLA claims for those aged 65+ began again on October 19th 2020.

If a claim is being made for someone terminally ill, the DWP has opened an e-mail facility to allow the relevant form (DS1500) to be e-mailed to them, rather than posted. The DS1500 will only be accepted if it’s sent in from a GOV.UK e-mail address however. The DWP already have a facility to receive the DS1500 from
NHS.net e-mail addresses. The DS1500 should be sent to the following email address: pip.e-ds1500@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Until 31 July 2021, Motability customers who are experiencing ‘temporary and exceptional financial need’ due to Covid can now apply for an **advance** of the £600 Good Condition Bonus (GCB), which is usually only paid to customers at the end of the vehicle lease.


**Universal Credit (UC)**

UC is a means-tested benefit that is replacing tax credits, housing benefit, income support, and the income-related versions of ESA and JSA. It has a savings limit (£16,000) and people who live together as a couple have to claim and be assessed jointly, on a month by month basis. It can be paid on its own, or as a top-up to other benefits or earnings, including furlough pay.

The families of NHS and social care workers who die from coronavirus, and receive compensation under the NHS and Social Care Coronavirus Life Assurance Scheme, will find that the £60,000 lump sum breaches capital limits rules for most benefits such as universal credit and housing benefit. [Guardian article – UK families bereaved by Covid lose eligibility for welfare benefits.](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/apr/03/uk-families-bereaved-by-covid-lose-eligibility-for-welfare-benefits)

Workers, who are sick or self-isolating, and whose household income and capital are low enough, may qualify for UC. UC can also be paid on top of Job Support Scheme, SEISS, SSP or new style ESA, if their household income and capital are low enough.

**Claiming UC** can be done by creating an on-line account at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) or via the phone 0800 328 5644. The demand on the DWP is huge and delays are inevitable. Claimants are no longer required to attend face-to-face meetings with work coaches. Jobcentres have now re-opened, but with a limited service, and will continue to support people who do not have access to (or are unable to use) a phone or go online.

- See page 3 above for additional information on claiming UC. [Watch this video about making a claim.](https://www.gov.uk)

**Citizens Advice have a Help to Claim service** for UC on 0800 144 8444.

New out-of-work UC claimants will now be required to look for work and could in theory therefore be ‘sanctioned’.

When telephone health assessments were introduced in employment and support allowance (ESA) and universal credit earlier this year, an easement was in put in place so that Fail to Attend (FTA) and Fail to Participate (FTP) actions were not taken as a result of someone not attending a scheduled telephone assessment.’
However, since 2 November 2020, the ESA and universal credit telephone assessment appointment letters will make it clear that claimants must attend their telephone appointment, and that -

‘FTA and FTP action will commence, e.g. benefit may be stopped (ESA) or entitlement changed (universal credit), for those who have been issued with this letter and fail to attend or participate in their appointments without good reason.’

Self-employed claimants no longer have to attend an interview with a case manager at the start of their claim to see whether they are 'gainfully self-employed'.

Minimum Income Floor (MIF) is a notional level of self-employed earnings used to calculate the UC award. It is used by DWP when the actual net profit from self-employment is lower than the MIF. This has now been temporarily removed, which means the claimant’s actual self-employed earnings are used in the calculation of UC, even if they are low (or zero) due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The MIF was suspended in March 2020 and will now remain suspended until the end of July 2021. It will be gradually reintroduced from August, with DWP Work Coaches applying discretion to not apply it on an individual basis where they assess that claimants’ earnings continue to be affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

How much will you get?

The monthly standard allowance of UC was increased, originally until April 2021 and now to September 31st by £20 per week. The monthly rates are:

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<tr>
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<th>April – Sept 2021</th>
<th>Oct 2021- April 2022</th>
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<tr>
<td>Single U25</td>
<td>£344.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single 25+</td>
<td>£411.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couple U25</td>
<td>£490.60</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 25+</td>
<td>£596.58</td>
<td>£509.91</td>
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</table>

You then add:

- extra amounts for children and young people in non-advanced education (all children born before April 2017, or any born April 2017 onwards who are the 1st or 2nd children in the family
- an extra amount if the claimant or partner has limited capacity for work due to ill-health and can’t do work-related activity e.g. go on training courses
- an amount for being the carer of a disabled person
- housing costs, which generally means rent as no help is available with mortgage interest except as a loan (and only then if not working at all and after 9 months on benefit). Rental amount may be capped if in private sector or reduced due to ‘spare bedrooms’ in social sector. If someone can’t pay their rent, or the full amount, they should seek advice, because evictions for non-payment were temporarily suspended but that protection is being
They may also be able to claim a discretionary housing payment (see below).

From the total of the above, DWP take into account 63% of any earnings and all of most other benefits being received, except child benefit and disability-related benefits. Parents and people who have limited capacity for work can earn up to a certain amount before the 63% deduction kicks in.

Any UC due when those two sets of figures are compared (what you need to live on and what you already have) is paid as UC, around 5 weeks after the date of claim. The claimant can immediately ask for a repayable advance payment however, to see them through those first weeks. That advance payment is recovered over the following 24 months (12 months for advances made before April 2021).

Any existing tax credit will stop immediately if universal credit is claimed and will not re-start afterwards, although a claimant may still be entitled to some universal credit instead at that point.

Pension credit (PC)

To get PC, the claimant has to be over pension age (66). If part of a couple, they BOTH need to be over pension age. If one of them is under pension age, and they need help with rent or to replace lost or reduced earnings, they would need to claim UC. Pension credit can now be claimed on-line via www.gov.uk.

Working tax credit (WTC) and child tax credit (CTC)

No new claims can be made for tax credits. However, if a person is already getting CTC, and is working, they may be able to add WTC to it if their income has fallen. This would be as an alternative to claiming universal credit, and people should seek advice as to which is the best option for them.

Workers already receiving WTC can continue to receive it for 28 weeks, while they are off work and claiming SSP or new style ESA. Workers already in receipt of WTC do not have to report a drop in working hours due to the COVID-19 outbreak but do have to report if they cease to be employed. Working parents who are on the Government’s coronavirus support schemes will still be eligible for childcare support, including the 30 hours offer and Tax-Free Childcare, even if their income levels fall below the usual threshold temporarily whilst on these schemes.

In April 2021, WTC claimants got a £500 one-off coronavirus payment.

You can check your eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare or 30 hours free childcare in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) online. Parents and carers who are Working Tax Credits customers should check their eligibility and updated guidance relating to coronavirus online.

Bereavement
Social Fund funeral payments are available from the DWP, based on the income of the claimant. Apart from the cost of a basic funeral, the previous £700 cap for the discretionary element has been increased to £1,000 for all deaths on or after April 8th, 2020. For more details about this and the bereavement support payment, see Coronavirus (COVID-19): help and support if someone dies.

Housing benefit (HB)

No new HB claims can be made by people of a working age – help with rent comes through UC instead – unless in certain types of temporary or supported accommodation. However, if you already get HB and your income has fallen or stopped, you would be due more benefit. This would be as an alternative to claiming UC, and people should seek advice as to which is the best option for them.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for UC and HB

LHA rates are used to calculate the maximum amount of rent that can be covered by HB and the housing costs element of UC, for claimants who live in privately rented accommodation. The rates increased permanently from 1 April 2020 but have been frozen at that level for 2021/22.

Benefit cap

Some benefit claimants have a £20k a year (£23k in London) ‘cap’ placed on their total benefit income. See Gov.uk Benefit Caps and seek advice if this applies to you.

Newly-unemployed claimants have a 9 months grace period before it is applied if they have worked for the previous year, and some claimants are exempt e.g. if a member of family is getting PIP, DLA or Carers Allowance

Discretionary Housing Payments DHP)

The government has announced additional funding for councils to spend on DHPs for people who are struggling to pay their rent or other housing costs. To apply for a DHP, a claimant must be receiving HB or the housing costs element of UC.

They should apply to their local district or borough council. Each council has its own online application page. If the tenant is turned down, they should seek advice from an independent advice agency.

Council tax

People may be able to get help with their council tax by claiming help from their district or borough council. Help with council tax is available either through means-tested support or various reductions, exemptions and discounts. People who have claimed UC or other benefits should make a simultaneous application for support.
**Benefit appeals and tribunals**

There are new processes in place for all benefit tribunals, as HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) make their services coronavirus-compliant. HMCTS will list all cases before a triage panel or in some cases a single judge. If the appeal can be allowed, then the panel will issue a decision. The appellant can still apply for the decision to be set aside if unhappy. The matter would then be listed for a telephone hearing (see below) and all options will be available to the next Tribunal, including disallowing the appeal. Those appeals that the triage panel feel unable to allow on the papers will be listed for telephone hearings.

There will be no face-to-face hearings during the current situation. Where an appeal cannot be fairly and justly allowed 'on the balance of probabilities on available evidence', judges are advised that they should consider whether to:

- make directions to obtain further evidence (although obtaining GP records or any other evidence is probably not an option during this crisis); or
- arrange a remote hearing when a hearing needs to be held, either online or by telephone or video, using the normal panel composition where practicable.

**Free school meals, support for pupils and Healthy Start vouchers**

Pupils who cannot attend school because they are not the children of key workers can get an equivalent to a free school meal if they would normally have qualified on low-income grounds. This includes those on a low-income in Nursery to Year 2, but not those in those year groups who are not on a low-income.

**Schools to get help with technology**

All secondary schools have been invited by the Government to order laptops and tablets through the ‘Get help with technology service’ to support remote education. The Department of Education (DfE) is inviting primary schools to order over the coming weeks, starting with the most disadvantaged areas in England and will contact each school by email as soon as they can order. Most orders will be delivered within two working days of being placed, and DfE aim to deliver all orders within five working days. They are also providing internet connections where they are needed.

**Increasing data allowances on mobile devices to support disadvantaged children**

Councils, schools and academy trusts can now request help to increase mobile data allowances for children and young people who:

- do not have fixed broadband at home
- cannot afford additional data for their devices
- are experiencing disruption to their face-to-face education.

Mobile data increases can also be requested when schools report a closure or have pupils self-isolating, as well as for children who cannot attend school face-to-face because they are clinically extremely vulnerable. If increasing mobile data isn’t a suitable option for some children, schools can also request 4G wireless routers.
**Healthy Start vouchers**, worth up to £8.50 per child, are available to pregnant women and families who have a low income and have a child under 4. The voucher increased in value from £3.10 per child (£6.20 if under1) to £4.25 (£8.50) from April 2021. See [https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/](https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/) to get more information about who qualifies and how to apply

**Help with fuel costs**

People can get advice about [what to do if they are struggling to pay their energy bills from the Citizens Advice website](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/)

The Government and energy suppliers have agreed to new emergency measures to help prepayment customers during the pandemic, including posting cards loaded with emergency credit to those who are self-isolating, adding discretionary credit to meters, and allowing users to nominate someone to top up for them.

Utility companies have also provided information and advice for individuals and families struggling to pay their bills during the COVID-19 outbreak e.g.

- [British Gas Coronavirus update](https://www.britishgas.co.uk/news/coronavirus-
- [EDF Coronavirus update](https://www.edfenergy.co.uk/news-and-insight/coronavirus-
- [EON Coronavirus update](https://www.eon.co.uk/news/coronavirus-
- [Npower Coronavirus update](https://www.npower.co.uk/news-and-insight/coronavirus-

All water companies are halting debt collection visits and are not applying for any new court orders during the current crisis.

**Advice to People Struggling with Essential Bills or Facing Eviction**

The Government has [updated the advice for those in difficulty with utility bills](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-those-in-difficulty-with-utility-bills), or repayment commitments on credit cards, loans and [mortgages](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-those-in-difficulty-with-mortgages), as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. The guidance sets out actions people are encouraged to take if they are struggling to pay bills and sets out detail on actions Government has taken with different utility providers, as well as loan, credit card, insurance and mortgage providers. The Government has extended the deadline for applying for a mortgage payment holiday to 31 March 2021.

A new scheme called [Breathing Space](https://www.stepchange.org/debt-info/your-rights/breathing-space.aspx) is being launched in May 2021, which freezes any action that creditors can take for 60 days. See [https://www.stepchange.org/debt-info/your-rights/breathing-space.aspx](https://www.stepchange.org/debt-info/your-rights/breathing-space.aspx)

The ban on evictions in England has been extended for another two months until 'at least' 31 May 2021. “Residential tenants will … be supported as the ban on bailiff-enforced evictions in all but the most serious circumstances - such as incidents of fraud or domestic abuse - and the requirement for landlords to provide 6-month notice periods to tenants before they evict will … be extended until at least 31 May” [Understanding the possession action process: guidance for landlords and tenants](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-possession-action-process-guidance-for-landlords-and-tenants) gives more information.
New Employment Schemes

- Businesses will be given £2,000 for each new apprentice they hire under the age of 25. This is in addition to the existing £1,000 payment the Government already provides for new 16-18-year-old apprentices and those aged under 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan.

- £150m increase to the local DWP flexible support fund to address claimants’ specific barriers preventing them from returning to work or provide training e.g. funding travel to interview costs, equipment or clothing to start employment or paying for replacement adult or child care to enable someone to undertake training, attend interviews or start work.

- A Kickstart Scheme to provide 6 month work placements for 16-14 year olds.. Funding available for each job placement will cover 100% of the National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week – and employers will be able to top up this wage. The scheme will be focused on supporting young people who are on Universal Credit and at risk of long term unemployment. Employers can apply directly online from 3 February 2021. DWP provide a single payment of £1,500 per Kickstart to support start-up costs and to contribute towards employability support.

- Restart scheme will give Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for at least 12 months enhanced support to find jobs in their local area.

   Digital job surgeries have been launched to help 160,000 get back into work
   More than 150,000 jobseekers across Great Britain could benefit from new employment support from the DWP, helping them build their interview skills, find local vacancies and get back into work.

Child Poverty Action Group have free resources on items such as support for workers and Universal Credit during the Covid-19 outbreak.

DWP guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): what to do if you’re already getting benefits
Coronavirus (COVID-19): what to do if you’re self-employed and getting less work or no work
Coronavirus (COVID-19): what to do if you were employed and have lost your job
Coronavirus (COVID-19): what to do if you’re employed and cannot work

If you are an EU, EEA or Swiss national, or a family member of such a national, it might be necessary for you to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme for settled or pre-settled status before 30/6/21 to continue to receive benefits. Some non-EU, EEA, Swiss citizens might also need to apply. For further information please see Stay in the UK (‘Settled Status’): Step by Step on gov.uk

Students in particular should also see student finance information
We hope you have found this factsheet useful. If you have any comments to make about content – things you would like to see or other changes you think we should make, please let us know on moneyadvice.unit@hertfordshire.gov.uk. Unfortunately, we can’t assist with individual benefit queries – please see list of advice agencies below. Please also see the benefit calculator on www.hertfordshire.gov.uk supplied by .

Further help and advice

DWP
Universal credit helpline 0345 600 0723
Online information: www.gov.uk/universal-credit
www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk

Citizens Advice (CA) 0344 4111 444
Online information: www.adviceguide.org.uk
Information about local CA and opening times: www.hcas.org.uk

CA Help To Claim Service for Universal Credit citizensadvice.org.uk/helptoclaim or 0800 144 8 444

How you can contact Hertfordshire County Council

Our website
Information about adult social care – find about care services, day centres and apply online for meals on wheels or a Blue Badge. You can also comment, compliment and complain.
www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/adults

Hertfordshire Directory
Find national and local community groups, charities, services and activities
www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/directory

HertsHelp
Independent information and advice on local community services and care funding
Telephone: 0300 123 4044
Minicom: 0300 456 2364
Email: info@hertshelp.net

Contact us
For information on how to get care and support
Email: contact@hertfordshire.gov.uk
Telephone: 0300 123 4042
Textphone: 0300 123 4041

British Sign Language (BSL) video interpreting service available Monday to Friday 8am-6pm.
**Drop in**
To your local library – see [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/libraries)

**If you are worried that you or someone you know is at risk of abuse or neglect**
Call us on 0300 123 4042 (24 hours a day)

**If you need help to understand**
Call 0300 123 4042 if you would like help to understand this information or need it in a different format. You can also ask to speak to someone in your own language.

Calls to 0300 cost no more than a national rate call to a 01 or 02 number

*Whilst every effort has been made to provide accurate information, this factsheet is for guidance only and should not be considered an authoritative statement of the law. Please see [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/benefits) for updates to this factsheet.*