

COVID-19: Test and Trace Support Payments Statutory and Discretionary Policy 2020

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1. Introduction

The following policy outlines the council's approach to administer the Government's Test and Trace Support Payments initiative.

From 28 September 2020, individuals are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary support payment of £500. This is to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.

These payments are designed to support people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and need to self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further societal and economic restrictions.

The scheme runs from 28 September 2020 until 30 September 2021. The application process will not be available until 12 October 2020. Someone told to self-isolate on or after 28 September (but before the 12 October 2020) will be able to make a backdated claim for payment.

2. Eligibility for payments

Standard scheme:

Eligibility for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment is restricted to people who:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- are employed or self-employed;
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; **and**
- are 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.

Any payment made will be in addition to any benefits and Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) that they currently receive.

Discretionary scheme

In addition to the standard scheme, a discretionary scheme is also available for individuals who:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- are employed or self-employed;
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result;
- have no more than £6,000 in capital/savings that can be accessed (ie. Bank account, ISA and not stocks and shares);
- work over 16 hours a week **and**
- are on a low income and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating, providing they would usually have earnings below £500 per week/ £26,000 per annum (gross)

A payment of £500 will be paid to applicants who meet the above criteria.

Any payment made will be in addition to any benefits and Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) that they currently receive.

3. Backdating

Eligibility for the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment, including discretionary payments, is for people who are told to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020 and who meet the relevant eligibility criteria.

Applications will be accepted retrospectively, as long as their period of self-isolation began on or after 28 September 2020.

Applications will not be accepted from people told to self-isolate before 28 September 2020, even if the period of self-isolation continues after 28 September.

4. Applications from members of the same household

People in the same household can each make an individual application to receive the payment, if they each meet the eligibility criteria.

5. Multiple claims

Some individuals could be asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace more than once.

Someone can claim more than once (if they are told to self-isolate multiple times), as long as they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual claim and their periods of self-isolation do not overlap.

For example, if someone claims for a period of self-isolation lasting from 1 October to 14 October and then claims again for a second period of self-isolation beginning on 10 October, they would only be allowed to claim once, because the two periods overlap. However, they would be allowed to claim for a second period of self-isolation that began after the first period had ended on 14 October.

6. Applications made after someone's period of self-isolation has ended

Eligible individuals can make a claim up to 42 days after their period of self-isolation ended. Applications will not be accepted after this point. For example, a person who is instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate until 10 October, they would have until 21 November to make a claim.

7. Third-party applications

Applicants can apply on behalf of someone else; however, the £500 must be paid into a bank account in the name of the person for whom the application is being made. For example, if someone applied on behalf of a parent, the payment would be made into the parent's bank account.

8. Applicants who are self-isolating who haven't been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace

Applications will only be considered from individuals who have a valid notification from NHS Test and Trace telling them to stay at home and self-isolate. The account ID can be found in either a text message or the email sent asking the individual to self-isolate.

9. Applicants who are quarantining after returning to the UK

The Test and Trace Support Payment scheme does not cover people who are self-isolating after returning to the UK from abroad, unless they have tested positive for coronavirus or have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

10. Application process

To apply, applicants will complete an online form (or a telephone application if digitally excluded) and provide:

- a notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate;
- proof of receipt of one of the qualifying benefits;
- a bank statement (as a basic up-front fraud check); and
- proof of employment or, if they are self-employed, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.

You may also be requested to provide other evidence to support your application.

How applicants should provide evidence

Evidence can be provided by uploading it with the application form or sending photographs of documents via email.

Using existing evidence

There may be some situations in which an applicant struggles to provide evidence, for example, if they do not have internet access and are applying over the telephone. To verify eligibility for the Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary payment, officers will use their discretion to accept existing evidence that we may already hold from the applicant - with their consent – provided the existing evidence is less than three months old.

11. Pre- Payment checks

Before any payment can be made, the following checks will be completed to ensure that each applicant:

- has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace;
- is employed or self-employed and will lose income because they cannot work from home;
- is receiving one of the benefits in the eligibility criteria; and
- meets any other requirement stated in either the main or discretionary scheme.

12. Making payments

Payments should be made to eligible individuals within three working days of an application being verified. Payments should be made up front, as a single payment, to the bank account matching the bank statement they have provided. Payments will be made by BACS.

Taxation

These payments will be subject to income tax, but they will not be subject to National Insurance Contributions (NICS). This is the case both for Test and Trace Support Payments and discretionary payments made under the scheme.

13. Appeals

There is no right of appeal against any decision not to award a payment, either for the main Test and Trace Support Payment or the discretionary payment. People who are turned down will not be eligible because they do not meet the criteria.

14. Eligibility for other benefits

These payments will be disregarded when calculating eligibility for other benefits. This includes calculating entitlement to Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

15. Evidence of failure to self-isolate

If through post-payment verification checks or through other means, we establish that someone has not self-isolated, the case will be referred to the police, and any Test and Trace support payments that have been made may be subject to recovery.

16. Fraud

Redditch Borough Council reserves the right to recover costs from people who are found to and receive the Test and Trace Support payment fraudulently.