



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Minister for Disabled People,
Health and Work
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All MPs

16th March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Face to Face Assessments for Health and Disability Benefits

The safety of DWP's claimants and staff is our number one priority. We have been considering what steps need to be taken to reduce the risk to vulnerable claimants and staff and we have therefore taken the decision to suspend all face-to-face assessments for health and disability related benefits with immediate effect. This includes Personal Independence Payment, the Industrial Injuries Scheme and Work Capability Assessments in both Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit. This decision has been taken as a precautionary measure, but one we feel is necessary in order to safeguard the health of individuals claiming these benefits, many of whom are likely to be at greater risk due to their pre-existing health conditions.

From tomorrow, 17th March, we are therefore suspending all scheduled face-to-face assessments for the next three months and will be making every effort to contact claimants to notify them that they no longer need to attend their appointment. Where we are unable to contact claimants and a claimant arrives for their scheduled assessment, we will offer a choice to the individual as to whether to continue with their assessment face-to-face or not. This decision will be reviewed on a weekly basis in line with Public Health advice.

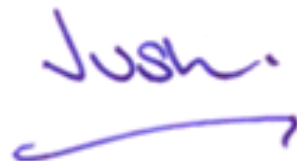
We are working at pace with our Assessment Providers to put in place alternative arrangements and I am grateful to the Providers for their support in working collaboratively with the Department to provide continuity of service at this critical time. We will therefore seek to assess claimants over the phone or on paper as opposed to having a face-to-face assessment.

I can confirm that we continue to accept new claims to all benefits and for existing claimants, benefits will remain in payment while these alternative arrangements are put in place. Any decisions made under the alternative arrangements will of course also come with Mandatory Reconsideration and Appeal rights as normal, should claimants wish to challenge any decision made.

We appreciate this may be a concerning time for claimants and welcome your support in communicating this to claimant and stakeholder groups to raise awareness of the change. I would like to stress that claimants do not need to take any action, we will be contacting them to discuss their appointment and to explain next steps as soon as we are able to do so. If claimants have any specific concerns about their claim or benefit however they should call the relevant benefit helpline number which can be found on GOV.UK.

The current NHS guidelines on Coronavirus, including advice on those who should stay at home can be found: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

I hope you will support this necessary step to reduce the risk to vulnerable claimants and will share this information with constituency members and local organisations.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Justin" with a flourish underneath.

Justin Tomlinson MP
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work