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Part of
Work and financial support during coronavirus

🏛
Department
of Health &
Social Care

Guidance
Self-isolation practical support: guidance for local authorities and the voluntary and community sector

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Funding background

Self-isolation of people who have coronavirus, or are at high risk of having the virus, is an integral part of the COVID-19 response and will remain so throughout the medium term, particularly in light of the threat posed by new variants. We also need to ensure high uptake of testing.

The main reported barriers to successful self-isolation include:

- a lack of understanding about self-isolation requirements and the importance of self-isolation
- concerns about financial consequences and employment risks
- the practical, social and emotional consequences of self-isolation, including:
  - access to food and other essential supplies
  - not being able to carry out caring responsibilities and practical tasks such as dog walking
  - impact on mental health and wellbeing, including loneliness and boredom

Funding is available to allow councils to provide financial support and to design and deliver bespoke interventions to support their local communities to self-isolate successfully when instructed to do so.

We recognise that a lot of work has been done by local authorities to stand up the support outlined in this guidance and hope that this continued funding can help to:

- further improve the support available
- offer up new types of support
- further engage voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners
- reach disproportionately impacted groups

An effective approach to ensuring high levels of adherence to self-isolation includes:

- practical, social and emotional support for those who need it, organised by councils and community groups
- financial support for people on low incomes who are unable to work from home and will lose income through self-isolating
- communications to improve awareness of when people need to self-isolate, how long for, what this involves, its importance in stopping the spread of the virus, the support available and consequences of breaking the rules

This guidance is designed to support councils in providing triaging processes and support packages for individuals who are required to self-isolate and need practical, social or emotional support to do so.

Self-isolation support funding streams

Local authority practical support fund

Key points:

- monthly grant payments made to upper-tier local authorities (UTLAs) by NHS Test and Trace
- for use by councils to provide support to people who have been told to self-isolate to carry out essential tasks or for offering social or emotional support
- this funding is ringfenced and should only be spent on the practical support areas, and any related activity, outlined in this framework
- verification of residency is not a prerequisite of receipt of this support

Test and Trace Support Payment (TTSP) scheme

Key points:

- regular funding is provided to lower-tier and unitary authorities by NHS Test and Trace to run the TTSP scheme
- there are 3 streams of funding provided for main payments, discretionary payments and administration costs
- spending is reported through the TTSP eligibility checker and regular finance returns
- this funding can only be spent on the TTSP scheme

Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)

This funding is available to support public health activities directly related to the COVID-19 response such as:

- testing
- non-financial support for self-isolation
- support to particular groups (clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) individuals, rough sleepers)
- communications and engagement
- compliance and enforcement

For further information on COMF, see the COVID-19 contain framework: a guide for local decision-makers and the Contain Outbreak Management Response Toolkit.

Practical support payments to local

authorities

The initial practical support funding provided £12.9 million per month from March to June 2021. The funding has been extended and increased and will now provide £15.6 million per month from July to September 2021. This is an overall funding allocation that is divided and distributed amongst UTLAs.

The funding is a ringfenced S31 grant, distributed via the COVID-19 relative needs formula to UTLAs.

Practical support funding can only be used to deliver practical, social and emotional support to people who are self-isolating as positive cases or close contacts. This funding cannot be used to deliver financial support.

Local authorities are expected to utilise their full allocation on a monthly basis. It is recognised that spend may not be equally distributed across months due to set-up costs, invoicing processes and so on. However, spend data will be assessed to review accrual of funds and future allocation may be altered accordingly.

Minimum support offer expectations

The local authority practical support fund is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the varying needs of individual local areas. Local authorities and VCS partners are best placed to understand the needs, demand, capacity and infrastructure in their local areas and we hope that this funding can be used dynamically and creatively to support self-isolation through practical measures in the most appropriate way locally.

Funding can be used to deliver direct services or to fund delivery partners, including VCS organisations. We expect funding to be used both to respond to an immediate demand and to maintain a contingency support offer, even when demand is low.

We encourage local authorities to exercise discretion and flexibility in allocating the funding and commissioning services.

Supporting access to food and essential supplies

Councils can use local discretion to decide how best to facilitate access to food and essential supplies for those in need. Any support should be designed to avoid unnecessary dependence and focused on helping individuals to access commercially available food offers where possible, as well as drawing on support from volunteers to help with shopping as needed.

Where possible:

- access to food and essential supplies should be provided quickly to minimise the risk of a household breaching self-isolation requirements
- support should be provided in the most cost-effective way, including making full use of commercial or other options as far as possible
- direct provision of food and essential supplies should be on an exception-only basis

Where individuals are able to access commercial offers independently, they should be expected to do so. Councils should operate a form of triage system as part of their contact strategy, to ensure that additional support is targeted on those who need it.

When deciding how to support access to food and essential supplies, local councils will need to consider:

- how quickly they can ensure individuals are supported to access food, to prevent the need to break self-isolation to get food supplies, taking into account cultural and dietary needs
- working with those who need support to access supermarket delivery slots
- leveraging NHS volunteer responders, local volunteer networks, VCS partners and mutual aid groups as effectively as possible
- making links to local support schemes – for example, food banks, voluntary sector referrals, vouchers, or cash grants

- where these options are not suitable, as a last resort, directly supplying suitable food to individuals

Providing practical and emotional support

Councils will make proactive contact through appropriate means to people flagged by NHS Test and Trace as having specific support needs to offer help in accessing support. Anyone required to self-isolate who seeks help directly from their local council should be able to receive the same help in accessing support as someone referred via NHS Test and Trace.

Through an inbound or outbound call, or an online tool if available, councils should assess support needs and decide what, if any, package of support is required, based on local policies and capacity.

People who are self-isolating should be supported to access food where they are unable to rely on family, friends or other support networks. Wherever possible access to food should be provided quickly to minimise the risk of a household breaching self-isolation requirements.

Councils should help people who do not have alternative support networks to access support in carrying out essential tasks.

Support should be provided in the most cost-effective way, including use of local volunteer networks where appropriate. These requirements may include informal basic support (for example, picking up shopping for a neighbour).

Councils should consider appropriate support where someone normally provides formal or informal care to someone else but is unable to do so because they must self-isolate. Councils should identify the essential support needs for these individuals during the period of their care provider's self-isolation – for example, dog walking, picking up shopping and running errands such as collecting parcels.

As with food access support, councils should make full use of NHS responders and local networks of volunteer support, where possible and appropriate, to ensure basic support needs are met in the most cost-effective way.

These requirements may include formal social care (either paid or unpaid). Councils should consider appropriate support where someone normally provides formal or informal care to someone else but is unable to do so because they must self-isolate. Councils should identify the essential support needs for these individuals during the period of their care provider's self-isolation.

Councils should note that changes to the self-isolation rules for contacts may cause issues for parents who test positive whose children may not need to self-isolate and therefore may still need to attend school. Councils could consider ways to support children to get to and from school without their parent or guardian needing to leave home. The Department for Education regularly updates its schools COVID-19 operational guidance which should be read in conjunction with general COVID-19 guidance.

Mental health and wellbeing support

Councils are best placed to work with individuals to identify whether they:

- can support themselves
- can seek assistance from family and friends
- require additional help or advice through the council or other organisations

Councils should be ready to signpost assistance relating to mental health.

Wellbeing measures could include:

- engaging in social contact
- providing reassurance

- providing check-ins
- making welfare calls

Mental health support measures could include:

- support groups
- charity and voluntary sector services
- telephone help lines
- online mental health support communities

Voluntary sector and civil society engagement

We strongly encourage local authorities to engage and fund VCS partners to help deliver practical, social and emotional support for self-isolation.

From previous data collection we know that many local authorities have strong working relationships with VCS partners and local voluntary groups. We encourage you to continue to build and strengthen these relationships and invest practical support funding in the services they offer.

Considering the different demographics within your area and their specific needs in relation to self-isolating effectively may help you to identify areas in which existing services could be improved or enhanced by further collaboration with VCS.

There are a number of VCS organisations, both local and national, that can offer advice and insight into the groups referenced here, a number of whom will be engaged with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Health and Wellbeing Alliance. See VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance for further information and a list of these organisations.

Free medicine delivery service

The government made a commitment in the roadmap to fund a free medicines delivery service to support individuals who are self-isolating after testing positive for COVID-19 or being identified as a close contact.

The medicines delivery service launched on 16 March and has recently been extended until the end of September 2021. To date, over £17.8 million has been approved to fund this service. The medicines delivery service is delivered through dispensing contractors – community pharmacies and dispensing doctors.

This service will be for prescription medication only and will be available during an individual's 10-day self-isolation period where no alternatives are available. In the first instance, patients should ask if any friends, family or volunteers can collect medicines for them.

Conditions of the medicine delivery service:

- individuals will need to call their local pharmacy or dispensing doctor and provide their unique contact tracing reference number to arrange delivery
- GPs are responsible for issuing prescriptions and in most cases will be able to issue an electronic prescription which can be sent straight to a pharmacy of the patient's choice. However, they cannot arrange for the medication to be delivered to the patient: individuals will need to directly contact the pharmacy to whom the prescription was sent
- pharmacies will only be able to deliver medicines that have been prescribed by a healthcare professional through this service
- individuals will need to contact their pharmacy and enquire about the service and arrange delivery. To receive the service, the patient will need to quote their unique contact tracing reference number. This is an 8-digit number that they will receive from NHS Test and Trace either via text or email
- the medicines delivery service is available as a last resort for individuals who have no

other options for obtaining their prescription medication while self-isolating. If friends and family are not able to collect medicines for an individual, and they or the pharmacy are unable to arrange for a volunteer through the NHS Volunteer Responders Programme, then they will be eligible for free medicines delivery

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