

Disability and the coronavirus

Disabled people face many challenges in the workplace and the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic will bring further additional challenges and barriers for disabled people at work. Many may have a compromised immune system leaving them more susceptible to getting an infection, while those with a mental health issue may at this time feel increased levels of anxiety and stress.

This information supports the national guidance issued that sets out UCU's position this includes a call for all colleges and universities to shut down their core functions, particularly those that involve face to face interaction.

- employers will have a duty to make a reasonable adjustment, if a disabled person is required to attend work or travel for work is a provision, criterion or practice (PCP) for the purposes of the Equality Act, if the PCP places the disabled person at a substantial disadvantage.
- employees with a disability or long-term health condition, should be given reasonable adjustments – this includes working from home and taking time off without no penalty to pay
- employees should be provided with assistive technology, this could be installing specific software on mobile devices to allow disabled workers to continue to work from home
- employees who have no disability but are living with or caring for a disabled person are protected under the EA10 as someone associated with a disabled person, from direct discrimination and harassment. In this case, employers should (as good practice) allow the person to work from home or allow time off from work.
- employers should conduct a risk assessment to identify and address all risks in the workplace that could compromise immune systems / health and wellbeing of disabled staff
- if disabled staff are told to self-isolate due to COVID-19, the absence should not trigger any sickness absence or disciplinary procedures and should be recorded as 'Self-isolation Coronavirus' to differentiate from other forms of sicknesses.

Access to work

If you require assistance that is not covered by your employer making reasonable adjustments, you may be able to get help from Access to Work. The grant does not have

to be paid back and will not affect your other benefits. Visit <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work> for further information.

Taking care of yourself

It is important that during this pandemic, you take every reasonable steps to keep yourself safe:

- register with your local council / NHS if you are a person classified as vulnerable – <https://www.gov.uk/>
- speak with your medical provider to ensure that you have enough medication in the event of self-isolation
- ask neighbours or friends to assist with shopping, collecting medication etc. Be sure that they follow guidance on social distancing and for vulnerable people <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>
- there are many local COVID-19 mutual aid groups providing support during this period – visit www.covidmutualaid.org
- eat well and stay hydrated
- exercise – are there any physical activity you can do inside your home?
- keep taking your medication. Speak with your surgery regarding arrangements for repeat prescriptions
- if you receive face to face counselling, find out if this can be continued by phone, text or online
- plan a daily routine that works for you

This information will be updated as per government guidance. You can read the latest UCU guidance here <https://www.ucu.org.uk/coronavirus>.