

COVID-19

Frequently asked questions



Members are asking lots of questions about COVID-19 and so we have prepared a special information sheet that answers some of the most common questions.

SAFETY

I support older and vulnerable people and go from house to house, how do I keep myself safe and keep them safe?

The employer's responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act continue to apply. The employer should have protocols, including providing you with personal protective equipment (PPE), such as face masks and gloves if appropriate (where you cannot keep a distance of a metre or more from another person).

If you are not aware of what the employer's protocols are contact your employer to discuss. You should also check out the Ministry of Health website at <https://www.health.govt.nz/> where you will find specific advice about face mask and hygiene advice.

I've run out of gloves/wipes/hand sanitiser/ cleaning materials, and my employer isn't helping when I ask for more. What do I do?

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 you are entitled to refuse to work because it is unsafe.

Can we ask our employer to provide extra PPE gear, such as hand sanitisers and masks?

Facemasks are recommended where your job requires you to have close contact with people with coronavirus. Refer to guidance from the Ministry of Health.

What is the recommended PPE and why are the employers not providing it?

The PPE necessary for your safety will depend on the nature of your work. The best protection is frequent handwashing and staying a metre and a half away from others.

Do I have to deal with clients and customers when I believe they are sick?

You can refuse unsafe work, but if your employer has provided you with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) you may have to go.

You may be able to refuse "intimate cares" that are unsafe, but vacuuming may be possible with proper hygiene, PPE and physical distancing.

Can I choose not to go in to work?

At Alert Level 4 (from 11:59pm, 25 March 2020) an essential service can be required to work so long as it is safe to do so.

If your work is not an essential service, you will not be allowed to do any face to face work.

I'm immune-compromised as I am over 70 years of age in an essential industry. Should I go to work?

It is likely you should stay home. Refer to www.covid19.govt.nz for further guidance.

What should I do if I don't think my employer is doing the right thing to keep us healthy and safe?

Contact E tū straight away on support@etu.nz and send an email to NHCCselfisolation@health.govt.nz

PAY

I don't have any leave, so what's going to happen to my pay if I have to self-isolate?

There is a "COVID-19 Leave Payment" available to your employer from the government. We are advising all employers to pay workers while they wait for their application to be processed. It is the law that when your employer gets this payment, they must pass it on in full to you.

The COVID-19 Leave Payment covers full-time, part-time and casual employees and contracted workers who are legally working in New Zealand.

The COVID-19 leave payment will be paid at the rate of:

- \$585.80 to a person working 20 hours or more per week
- \$350 to a person working less than 20 hours per week.

There is up-to-date information about this payment here: <https://workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/covid-19-support.html>

Turn over

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How do the leave and government provisions apply in relation to casual staff?

The COVID-19 payment can be applied for by the employer and can be paid to casual workers. An employer, sole trader, or self-employed person may qualify for the COVID-19 leave payment and this payment covers full-time, part time and casual employees and contracted workers who are legally working in New Zealand.

I work in a rest home facility and I only just returned from overseas travel. My employer has instructed me to stay home for 10 days but I don't have enough annual leave to cover me for that period and my employer is saying they won't pay me. Does the employer have the right to do this? And can I ask for annual leave in advance?

Government guidelines require you to stay at home for 14 days when you return to New Zealand. We are calling on all employers to make sure no worker is out of pocket in this situation.

Your employer should grant you paid special leave. The Government recommends that employers pay this in the first instance – employers can apply for government funding to cover it (see above under the previous question).

You can request annual leave or sick leave in advance, but the employer does not have to agree to it. We are not recommending that you do this unless it suits you to do so. Many employers have already agreed to pay our members in this situation.

Do I have to use my Annual Leave and Alternative Leave and Sick Leave if I go into self-isolation? I thought the government was paying for that?

So long as you are entitled to be covered by the government leave subsidy, you do not have to use your own leave entitlement first.

WORK RIGHTS AND UNIONS

Is E tū staying open?

Yes, all E tū staff are working from home during the Alert Level 4 shutdown, including E tū Support. We are however experiencing a very high number of calls at the moment and have been affected by the national disruption to the phone networks, so please try email support@etu.nz, if you are unable to get through on the phone.

If I'm a union member and if I'm made redundant, does that mean I can never apply for a job with my employer again?

Generally employers will allow employees to, apply after a set period of time after redundancy. Further investigations are underway

How will this impact those who have temporary work visas and are overseas?

They will not be allowed to re-enter New Zealand at this time. Only citizens and permanent residents are allowed to enter NZ.

The union was due to increase its membership fee on 1 April 2020 in line with CPI, a 1.9% increase. Will this still go ahead?

No, this will now be deferred until 1 July 2020.

If I am laid off from my job as a result of the COVID-19 public health and business disruption and cannot secure re-employment in a workplace with E tū membership, what happens to be my membership?

If you were an E tū member as at 23 March 2020 and you have been laid off due to COVID-19 disruption and have not been able to get employment in a worksite covered by E tū, you will be able to retain your membership until 30 September 2020. This means you will retain free access to E tū advice and support on employment related matters (further legal representation and advocacy will be at the discretion of the union.)

Why can't I get more definite answers from my boss and the Government? I'm sick of all this beating around the bush!

This is a unique situation. It is unfolding and changing daily. Very few employment agreements have provisions for this situation and few employers have plans they can implement. It is changing in line with government guidelines. E tū will answer all questions to the best of our ability at all times, and we are here to hear you, support you, and be there for you.

Sources of Information

www.workandincome.govt.nz

health.govt.nz

covid19.govt.nz