

Dear User,

We have had several requests for advice on what action should be taken for Learner Support weekly payments in the event of swine flu or other such diseases.

There are various situations in which an outbreak of swine flu could impact on the delivery of the service:

a) A learner being absent due to their own illness or the illness of a person within their household;

All learner support schemes currently have guidelines in place that explain how this is handled. For example, for EMA, Providers are asked to agree a sickness policy that takes account of the local circumstances and their cohort; and is then agreed by both the Provider and the learner at the time of enrolment. Both parties should adhere to this, while taking account of any special circumstances that may arise. This is not a change; it follows normal practice, which allows some flexibility.

b) A learner being unable to attend due to an isolated 'closure' of the Provider because of the illness of another learner at the Provider;

In this circumstance we would expect the Provider to take appropriate action. This may include setting work to be completed at home or making arrangements for learning to take place at another Provider or location, as appropriate. In these circumstances, providing that the normal EMA conditions are met, EMA payments should continue. A complicating factor may be where a Provider is unable to set work for sufficient Guided Learning Hours due to staff illness; in this circumstance, given that the learner has met their obligations, we would expect Providers to be flexible and authorise payments as appropriate providing all other conditions have been met.

c) Payments not being authorised at a Learning Provider due to the isolated illness of administrative or teaching staff;

Where the Provider cannot authorise payments due to non-availability of teaching or administrative staff as a result of illness we recommend that the Provider should use an alternative method for authorising payments. All Providers are expected to have at least two staff capable of authorising payments (the 'Super User' and the 'Standard User'). This would apply in cases where learning has taken place and all EMA conditions have been met. It may be that there are no trained staff available to authorise payments; in this circumstance, you should make contact with the Learner Support Service (LSS) for

support and advice on 0845 600 7979. This may include support from the Field Force or making arrangements for direct LSS authorisation.

It should be noted that in all cases, we would expect learners and Providers to be pragmatic and take appropriate decisions based upon the local circumstances.

If you have any questions about this email please contact the Learner Support Helpline on **0845 600 7979**.

Kind Regards.