

Sick leave: Essential Workers' Leave Scheme

Details of the new sick leave scheme for essential workers were announced today and the scheme will be available on Monday 6 April, for a period of at least 8 weeks.¹

The Beehive press release confirms essential workers who take leave from work to comply with public health guidance will be supported to ensure they continue to receive income. A number of essential businesses are still operating, but face a significant loss of business. This scheme is for them and allows them to pay those workers who need to take leave due to COVID-19 Public Health guidance at the same rates as the Wage Subsidy Scheme of: \$585.80 per week fulltime and \$350.00 per week for part time workers.

"We are ensuring that essential workers have the ability to take leave, and are not feeling pressured to come to work if they are vulnerable, sick or otherwise unable to work. The scheme will enable them to self-isolate and continue to receive an income in these circumstances" says Minister Iain Lees-Galloway.

"The scheme supports those who are unable to work from home and need to self-isolate, or are at higher risk of becoming sick with COVID-19, or have a higher risk person in their bubble"

"Not all workers in essential businesses will be in this position, but for those who are, it is a significant problem. For some workers this could be for the duration of the lockdown".

The scheme focuses on three groups of essential businesses workers:

1. Workers who are self-isolating in accordance with public health guidance because they have contracted the virus or have come into contact with

someone who has contracted the virus (or have a dependent they need to care for who is sick or self-isolating);

2. Those deemed at higher risk if they contract COVID-19, in accordance with public health guidance and should self-isolate for the duration of the lockdown (and potentially longer);
3. Those who have household members who are deemed at higher risk if they contract COVID-19, in accordance with public health guidance and, as such, should self-isolate for the duration of the lockdown (and potentially longer) to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to that household member.

The Government has announced that guidance is being prepared to discuss what it means to be 'at higher risk'. This guidance will be available before the scheme goes live on Monday.

Payments will be four-weekly with the option for essential businesses to re-apply for those same workers after four-weeks, or make further applications for additional workers who are eligible, at any time, while the scheme remains open.

Employers accessing the scheme should pay workers at either:

1. Their usual weekly income before COVID-19, if this is less than the relevant rate provided; or
2. A minimum of the full leave rate, if the workers' usual income before COVID-19 exceeds the relevant rate, and in that case also make best endeavours to pay at least 80 percent of the workers' usual income before COVID-19.

Employees who are on other forms of paid leave will still need to be paid at their usual rates.

The Scheme has been estimated by Hon Grant Robertson, Minister for Finance, to cost the Government \$100 million. The scheme is likely to apply to those high-risk workers who are 70 plus, immune-compromised or pre-disposed to contracting COVID-19 or workers who, themselves, live with these at-risk

¹ <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/essential-workers-leave-scheme-established>

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people. The detail will be in the guidance and will hopefully provide clarity.

Want to know more?

If you have any questions about the Essential Workers' Leave Scheme, please contact our specialist [Employment](#) team