



Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease that can be transmitted by person-to-person contact.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts to global public health and has fundamentally changed how people work and learn. There are over 5.9 million individuals with disabilities who are employed.<sup>2</sup> Given this significant number, the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) would like to offer the following support to our community.

## Overview of COVID-19 Guidance:<sup>3</sup>

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and dispose of tissue immediately
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Avoid public areas and public transportation
- Avoid sharing personal household items: glasses, bedding, utensils and towels
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

1. "What You Need to Know about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 20, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>.

2. "Table A-6. Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex, Age, and Disability Status, Not Seasonally Adjusted" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 6, 2020), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t06.htm>.

3. "What To Do If You Are Sick" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 25, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>.

4. Bryan Lufkin, "Coronavirus: How to Work from Home, the Right Way," BBC Worklife (BBC, March 13, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200312-coronavirus-covid-19-update-work-from-home-in-a-pandemic>.

## Vocational Support:

### How do I make a smooth transition to working from home?



Individuals with Down syndrome who had previously worked in person with several colleagues are now in certain cases having to adjust to working remotely. This can be a challenging adjustment but here are some tips to make the transition smooth:<sup>4</sup>

- **Ensure consistent communication:** It is especially important when faced with a new work environment to maintain good communication with your supervisor as well as your colleagues.
- **"Treat it like a real job":** While you may not have to physically go into work, it can be helpful to keep certain things consistent in your daily routine. Whether it is waking up at the usual time or wearing work attire, these may help with keeping the right kind of mindset in a person's approach to work.
- **Establish a home-work area:** If you do not have a designated home office or desk, it is important to create a dedicated place at home for work. This will limit distractions for when you are working, while also signaling to other people in the household that when that you are in that space you are working.
- **Engage with people:** COVID-19 has forced people to isolate as much as possible which impacts both our professional and personal lives. One big concern that can arise is a feeling of loneliness. To combat this, it is important to interact with people whenever appropriate. This can be achieved by engaging in video calls with either colleagues, through staff calls, or with family and friends outside of work.
- **Maintain clear boundaries:** Even though you are at home throughout the day, it is important to maintain clear boundaries. One technique to help with this is to set up activities to both start and end your day. An example could be starting work with a cup of coffee in the morning or scheduling a workout to end the day.





## Vocational Support (continued):

### Will I still have access to employment supports?

- As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, Federal and State governments are responding to the needs of people, especially individuals with disabilities.
- With regards to State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, they are transferring to provide virtual services, including VR counseling. This is extremely important for individuals who are currently working and need continued supports.
- As it relates to continued access to job coaching, contact the supported employment provider or other service organization to assess whether they are also able to provide these services virtually.
- Some of these organizations are offering a broad range of vocational services online. One example of this is [Goodwill Industries of the Valley \(in Southwest Virginia\)](#) who is offering a range of virtual services, including career coaching.<sup>5</sup>

### During this time, what information is my employer allowed to ask for?

- According to a report put together by [Disability:IN](#), there are several implications as to what information employers can request:<sup>6</sup>
  - Given that this is a pandemic, employers can ask employees whether they are feeling any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19.
  - Employers can ask to take an employee's body temperature as fever is associated with COVID-19.
  - If an employee is exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, an employer can ask that employee to stay home and provide a doctor's note prior to return to work.
  - An employer may withdraw an offer of employment to an applicant or delay that person's start date if that new hire has COVID-19.



### What employment opportunities are currently available in the community?

- While many industries are at risk of downsizing their labor force, there are opportunities available in the community for employment at the current time.
- Prior to pursuing an employment opportunity, it is very important to consult with a medical professional, especially if you have a history of certain diseases (including heart or lung disease). Once it has been determined to be safe, there are opportunities available across several industries at the current time:
  - One example of a company that is currently hiring is Amazon who is looking to add 100,000 full and part time employees.<sup>7</sup>
  - Another example of a company expanding its workforce is Walmart who is looking to add 150,000 employees.<sup>8</sup>
  - These hiring initiatives are not only occurring within large corporations, as small businesses are also looking to fill in hiring needs.<sup>9</sup>

5. "Virtual Services" (Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, n.d.), <https://www.goodwillvalleys.com/work-and-training-services/training-resources/virtual-services/>.

6. "COVID-19 and the Workforce" (Disability:IN, n.d.), [https://disabilityin-bulk.s3.amazonaws.com/2020/COVID19+DisabilityIN+Guidance+508\\_3\\_.pdf](https://disabilityin-bulk.s3.amazonaws.com/2020/COVID19+DisabilityIN+Guidance+508_3_.pdf).

7. Dave Clark, "Amazon Ramps Hiring, Opening 100,000 New Roles to Support People Relying on Amazon's Service in This Stressful Time," US Day One Blog (Amazon, March 17, 2020), <https://blog.aboutamazon.com/operations/amazon-opening-100000-new-roles>.

8. "Walmart Announces Special Cash Bonus and Early Payment of Q1 Bonuses Totaling Nearly \$550 Million for Hourly Associates" (Walmart, March 19, 2020), <https://corporate.walmart.com/newsroom/2020/03/19/walmart-announces-special-cash-bonus-and-early-payment-of-q1-bonuses-totaling-nearly-550-million-for-hourly-associates>.

9. Lester Graham, "People Are Losing Jobs, but Some Big and Small Companies Are Hiring" (Michigan Radio, March 23, 2020), <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/people-are-losing-jobs-some-big-and-small-companies-are-hiring>.



## Vocational Support (continued):

### How might my benefits be affected?

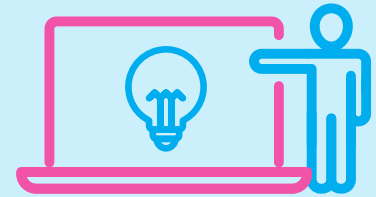
- The COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on the job market. If an individual is either furloughed, laid off or has their hours reduced and is a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient then it is important to report that change in income as quickly as possible.
- This will ensure, within a certain amount of time, that a person's SSI benefit amount will reflect any decrease in income from employment.
- However, given that the Social Security Administration (SSA) has "suspended face-to-face service to the public in our field offices and hearings offices nationwide until further notice," it is important to report income changes in an appropriate manner.<sup>10</sup>
- Specifically, you can report these changes in income by either phone (1-800-772-1213) or online (<https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/>).<sup>11</sup>
- Depending on where you live, some states do not allow SSI recipients to apply for Unemployment Insurance. However, other states mandate that people exhaust other benefit options prior to receiving SSI. Given the variety in policy, please contact your local SSA office or State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for specific information.

### What can I do to stay connected if I am no longer going to work?

As noted earlier, it is important to engage in activities to prevent unnecessary isolation or loneliness. Many people who rely on work as a positive environment to engage in social relationships. Sadly, many can no longer depend on that due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are some techniques to address this:<sup>12</sup>

- **Identify new techniques to engage with family and friends:** This can take many forms including playing board games or eating a meal over a video calls or hosting Netflix watch parties.
- **Connect with loved-ones:** Given that we should limit physical contact with loved-ones, you can engage in other ways to stay connected. This could involve sending letters or emails.
- **Impact of social media:** Many of the posts throughout the various social media platforms seem to focus on the impact of COVID-19. If this is overwhelming, take this opportunity to step away from those platforms.

### What resources are available at the current time for me to improve my skills?



As many people spend a larger amount of time at home, there is an opportunity to increase your skillset. This skill development can be extremely useful to prepare for an employment opportunity or advancement within a company. Here are some resources that can be accessed online:

- **Coursera** - offers access to free online courses from universities
- **Office 365 Training Center** - provides free resources for those looking to improve their Microsoft Office skills
- **YouTube** - access to a free library of vocational training videos
- **Lynda.com** (LinkedIn Learning) - offers a variety of courses across different professional topics. This does have a cost, however, they are offering a free month
- **Skillshare** - provides free access to a library of classes, including in customer service

10. "Social Security & Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)" (Social Security Administration, March 26, 2020), <https://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/>.

11. "Spotlight on Reporting Your Earnings to Social Security -- 2019 Edition" (Social Security Administration, 2019), <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-reporting-earnings.htm>.

12. "How to Stay Connected to Loved Ones Despite Social Distancing," healthessentials (Cleveland Clinic, March 24, 2020), <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-to-stay-connected-to-loved-ones-despite-social-distancing/>.