



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

Minister for Disabled People,  
Health and Work  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
LONDON  
SW1H 9DA

[www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

23 November 2020

Dear Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP,

Thank you for your letter of 11 November regarding the suspension of face to face assessments and processing of new claims for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB).

The COVID-19 outbreak has been unprecedented and we took the difficult decision to temporarily suspend all face-to-face assessments in order to protect the health of claimants and staff. I am deeply saddened that some individuals have died or seen their health deteriorate while waiting for their IIDB assessments. We know that increasing numbers of claimants are awaiting assessments, but we must ensure that when we open up our assessment centres again, they are COVID-secure and claimants feel confident coming to them.

We are not currently able to lift the suspension on face to face assessments for IIDB claims due to the restrictions in place to control the spread of COVID-19, but work is continuing at pace to ensure readiness when these restrictions are lifted. The nature of IIDB assessments, which often involve spending an hour, sometimes longer, in an enclosed private space with a healthcare professional with some assessments involving direct medical examination, makes this particularly difficult. In addition, some of our claimants are less able to comply with safety mitigations such as face coverings or social distancing.

I recognise that there is a balance to be struck between the public health concerns and the need to effectively deliver DWP outcomes. My officials and I have sought advice on re-opening safely from Public Health England, the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Health and Social Care, including discussions with the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Jenny Harries. In planning how to deliver our services, we must take account of community transmission rates across the country, considering risks with respect to both claimants and staff. The resumption of face to face services will closely follow the latest UK Government and Devolved Administration guidance around working from home, minimising use of public transport and continuing to reduce overall social interactions, particularly those in indoor enclosed spaces.

I would like to reassure you that we have continued to process IIDB claims for those individuals with terminal illnesses, and those for Fast Track prescribed diseases. These claims have continued to be assessed as usual without the need for a face to face assessment.

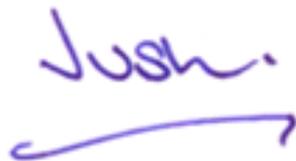
In terms of your questions regarding the processing of IIDB claims, operational management information shows that the current number of outstanding IIDB claims awaiting an assessment has risen by approximately 3000 to 5,300, when compared with March 2020. The average age of the IIDB cases currently outstanding is 116 days.

Following a successful trial, we have now begun paper based assessments for certain prescribed diseases. Assessing some cases on paper means that we can reduce the overall backlog and give some claimants the awards they are entitled to. Over the coming weeks, we will be looking to increase the volume of cases we are able to process in this way based on the feedback we receive from our providers and healthcare professionals who are ensuring that the quality of the assessment outcomes remains high. At present the paper based approach includes claims for asbestosis (D1) and Pleural Thickening (D9), which you specifically refer to in your letter.

I am however aware of the importance of face-to-face assessments for those claimants where there is no alternative approach. We will restart face to face assessments as soon as we are able to and will do so initially on a voluntary basis. I am committed to scaling up face-to-face assessments when it is safe to do so.

I can assure you that no one will lose out on any entitlement to IIDB payments. Award payments will be backdated to the date of application. Reassessment awards have been extended to ensure that payments continue. Any deteriorations which would have resulted in an increase in award will be backdated once face-to-face assessments recommence, to ensure no one is left out of pocket.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Justin" with a stylized flourish underneath.

**Justin Tomlinson MP**  
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work