

16 MARCH 2020



In this edition we cover:

General guidance: Covid-19
employment issues

The increasing incidence of the Covid-19 virus means that employers should be aware of and prepared to deal with issues arising, including specific employee issues. Set out below are areas to address.

- Keep informed and up to date with Government and NHS advice on symptoms and appropriate action and share with employees as required.
- Ensure staff dealing with clients and customers, managers and senior staff can identify symptoms.
- Ensure staff contact details are accurate and up to date.
- Develop a system for emergency communication with staff if required.
- Address hygiene in the workplace in particular:
 - Review hygiene systems (1) providing advice on handwashing (2) provision of additional handwashing or hand sanitising facilities (3) access to and means for hygienic disposal of tissues.
 - Increase the frequency and depth of cleaning – see ACAS Covid-19 guidelines.



General guidance: Covid-19 employment issues

- Carry out risk assessments for higher risk staff groups such as those with lower immunity or respiratory issues and pregnant women.
- Carry out suitable risk assessments where staff will come into contact with affected clients, customers or colleagues.
- Prepare to rotate/redeploy staff as permitted by contracts to other roles where absence results in understaffing – Provide training for re-deployed staff.
- Address any issues arising from reduced staffing such as increased lone working or working hours.
- Deal with increased levels of absence, including:
 - Increase the availability of bank or casual staff to address potential staff shortages.
 - Remind employees of sickness absence procedures.
 - Advise genuinely sick employees to stay away from work.
 - Adjust reporting requirements e.g. to accept backdated fit notes where staff have been unable to attend a GP for absences of over 7 days/alternative evidence.
 - Identify key staff and put in place arrangements to handle their absence.
 - Consider remote working, staggered working or shift working to minimise numbers of staff potentially being affected by an outbreak.
- Check data protection and other vital systems can function in the absence of key staff.
- Review and recirculate policies on:
 - Sickness, for example to adjust terms on return to work so that staff only return on being medically advised/ adjust reporting/certification requirements.
 - Dependent leave – consider extending the usual 1 to 2 days entitlement where a dependent falls ill.
 - Unpaid parental leave – consider adjusting notice or evidential requirements to allow up to 4 weeks to be taken in blocks of one week on short notice with evidence to be provided subsequently.
 - Review contractual terms on lay off or short time working to deal with any reduced workloads.
 - Recirculate equality policy and remind staff that harassment based on nationality will not be tolerated (i.e. where Chinese nationals or those from other Covid-19 hotspots are targeted).
- Contractual/pay issues:
 - If individual staff are required by you not to attend – i.e. to voluntarily self-isolate – in principle, they should be paid in full.
 - If you decide to close the business temporarily and staff are able and willing to attend they should be paid in full unless they have been laid off in accordance with contracts or with agreement.



General guidance: Covid-19 employment issues

Alternative arrangements such as taking annual or unpaid leave may be agreed with staff.

- If staff are medically advised to self-isolate they should be treated as if they were sick and paid sick pay.
- If staff are unwell they should be paid sick pay/SSP.
- If staff are well but refuse/are unwilling to attend work, discuss in detail to address concerns, consider adjustments/home working and take advice before progressing to disciplinary action.
- If your organisation is required to shut down by the Government and staff are able and willing to attend they should be paid in full unless they have been laid off in accordance with contracts or with agreement. Alternative arrangements such as taking annual leave or remote working may be agreed with staff. If such a shut down is in place for an extended period, please contact us for advice.

Additional resources

UK government latest guidance and advice:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

Scottish government latest guidance and advice:
<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

NHS latest guidance and advice:
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus>

ACAS Coronavirus advice:
<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>

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