



Coronavirus FAQs

Updated 17/03/2020

We have outlined a few of the commonly asked questions that our team are being asked by our clients around Coronavirus and how to minimise disruption for your business.

Managing Absence

Q1: Do we have to pay someone if they have to go into self-isolation?

The government has stated that if anyone is showing the following symptoms or lives with someone who is showing the following symptoms

- A new continuous cough
- A high Temperature

If they live alone should self-isolate for 7 days. If they live in a household where they or another member of the household is showing symptoms, they should isolate for 14 days.

They do not need to contact 111 and should not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital, they should receive any Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) due to them. If you offer contractual sick pay, it's good practice to pay this. You do not require evidence of sickness from the employee.

Q2: What advice can you give employees who are self-isolating for 7 days?

Managers should contact the employee to check how they are, and to ascertain what contact the employee would like from their manager whilst they are off.

Advise the employee to use 111 online if:

- They cannot cope with their symptoms at home
- Their condition gets worse
- Their condition is no better after 7 days

Agree to speak to them on day 6 or 7 to find out how they are and if they can return to work.

Q3: What if an employee is not sick but the employer tells them not to come to work?

If an employee is not sick but their employer tells them not to come to work, they would usually get their usual pay. However, if the employees have all been briefed on the Coronavirus symptoms and the fact they should self-isolate without attending work and they have come into work with the symptoms and are immediately sent home, you can pay them SSP as above.

Q4: What if an employee needs time off work to look after someone?

Employees are entitled to time off work to help someone who depends on them (a 'dependant') in an unexpected event or emergency. This would apply to situations to do with Coronavirus.

For example:

- if they have children they need to look after or arrange childcare because their school has closed
- to help their child or another dependant if they're sick, or need to go into isolation or hospital

There's no statutory right to pay for this time off, but some employers might offer pay depending on the contract or workplace policy, or you may be able to allow them to take some time as holiday and be paid for it.

If someone needs to take dependents leave but can work alternative hours or days, then they can be paid for the hours that they can work.

**Q5: What if an employee does not want to come to work?**

Some people might feel they do not want to come to work if they're afraid of catching Coronavirus. You should listen to any concerns staff may have. Are they particularly "vulnerable"?

- 60 years plus
- Cardiovascular disease
- Respiratory condition
- Diabetic
- Have an underlying health condition

If so, discuss if there are any alternative working arrangements for these employees. If there are genuine concerns, you should try to resolve them to protect the health and safety of their staff. For example, if possible, you could offer flexible working. If an employee still does not want to come in, you could consider allowing them to take the time off as holiday or unpaid leave. However, you do not have to agree to this. If an employee refuses to attend work, it could result in disciplinary action.

Q6: How should we deal with staff needing to self-isolate after a holiday?

If the employee knowingly travels to an area that will require self-isolation on their return, they need to decide whether they intend to continue with the travel. If they do decide to travel (i.e. they knowingly travel aware that quarantine will be required on their return), then inform them that the period of quarantine would be unpaid absence.

If an employee is required to self-isolate on their return and are displaying symptoms and are unable to attend work, then it is good practice to pay in-line with your company sick pay policy.

Q7: What do we do when an employee has booked time off for holiday, but their holiday is cancelled because of a situation outside of their control (e.g. flight cancellations or the destination country status means they are advised not to travel there)? Can the employee cancel their annual leave and take it again at another time?

This is at your discretion as an employer. It might be straight-forward for you to allow this with minimal business disruption. But you have no obligation to allow the cancellation. However, it is good practice where possible to support employees in this situation.

Within the Workplace**Q8: What if someone becomes unwell at work?**

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace and has not been to specified areas in the last 14 days, then normal practice should continue.

If they have recently come back from an area affected by Coronavirus, they should:

- get at least 2 metres (7 feet) away from other people
- go to a room or area behind a closed door, such as a sick bay or staff office
- avoid touching anything
- cough or sneeze into a tissue and put it in a bin, or if they do not have tissues, cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow
- use a separate bathroom from others, if possible

The unwell person should use their own mobile phone to call either 111 for NHS advice. Or 999 if an emergency) They should tell the operator:

- their symptoms
- which country they've returned from in the last 14 days.

Q9: What if an employee with suspected Coronavirus has recently been in your workplace?

For contacts of a suspected case in the workplace, no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results for COVID19 are awaited.

In particular, there is no need to close the workplace or send other employees' home at this point.

Most possible cases turn out to be negative. Therefore, until the outcome of test results is known there is no action that the workplace needs to take.

Q10: What if someone with confirmed Coronavirus has been to work?

If someone with confirmed Coronavirus comes to work, the workplace does not necessarily have to close. The local Public Health England (PHE) health protection team will get in contact with the employer to:

- discuss the case
- identify people who have been in contact with the affected person
- carry out a risk assessment
- advise on any actions or precautions to take

Q11: What if employees in the workplace have had contact with a confirmed case of Coronavirus?

Reassure employees that the workplace is unlikely to have to close.

Contacts are not considered cases and if they are well, they are very unlikely to have spread the infection to others.



Employees who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case do not need to take any precautions and can continue to attend work.

Check latest Govt advice on this [point here](#).

Q12: What if I need to close the workplace?

You should plan in case you need to close temporarily. For example, making sure employees have a way to communicate with the employer and other people they work with.

Where work can be done at home, you could:

- ask employees who have work laptops or mobile phones to take them home, so they can carry on working
- arrange other tasks that can be done at home for employees who do not work on computers

In some situations, if you do need to close down the business for a short time, unless it says in the contract or is agreed otherwise, you may need to pay employees for this time.

If you think you'll need to do this, it's important to talk with employees as early as possible and throughout the closure.

Q13: I've heard schools will close so what action should we take if our local schools close and parents/employees can't attend work?

Begin the "what if" conversations now to encourage employees who are parents to consider their childcare options. The usual rules apply for 'dependents leave', so parents should arrange appropriate childcare if possible (please be aware that grandparents may fall into high risk category and therefore may not be able to support your employees with their childcare).

Ask your employees what hours they may be able to work from home, which may be different times to their usual working hours.

In the meantime, employers should allow unpaid time off for the parents. If parents can work from home, this will help if their children are old enough to not require constant attention during working hours. You must pay employees for the hours they can work.

Finances

Q14: I'm concerned that with business revenue falling rapidly that I won't be able to pay my employees?

Before considering long term "layoff" or Redundancy" options consult with your employees about:

- Reduced hours
- Unpaid leave
- Reduced pay

Look to protect the long service and skill set in the business, in order that you are ready for the business to preform once this situation is over.

Q15: What business support is there for me as an employer in terms of sick pay?

Legislation will allow small and medium-sized businesses and employers to reclaim Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) paid for sickness absence due to COVID-19. The eligibility criteria for the scheme will be as follows:

- this refund will cover up to 2 weeks' SSP per eligible employee who has been off work because of COVID-19
- employers with fewer than 250 employees will be eligible - the size of an employer will be determined by the number of people they employed as of 28 February 2020
- employers will be able to reclaim expenditure for any employee who has claimed SSP (according to the new eligibility criteria) as a result of COVID-19
- employers should maintain records of staff absences and payments of SSP, but employees will not need to provide a GP fit note
- eligible period for the scheme will commence the day after the regulations on the extension of Statutory Sick Pay to those staying at home comes into force
- the government will work with employers over the coming months to set up the repayment mechanism for employers as soon as possible

Q16: What about support with business rates?

Business Rates retail discount in England has been discounted to 100% for the 2020 to 2021 tax year for properties below £51,000 rateable value.

The relief will also be expanded to the leisure and hospitality sectors in response to COVID-19.

Businesses that received the retail discount in the 2019 to 2020 tax year will be rebilled by their local authority as soon as possible.

Those businesses eligible for the newly expanded retail discount and/or the new pubs discount may need to apply to their local authority to receive the discount.

Any enquiries on eligibility for, or provision of the reliefs should be directed to the relevant local authority. Guidance for local authorities on the application of the expanded retail discount will be published by 20 March.

Q17: I don't pay business rates is there any support for me?

The government will provide an additional £2.2 billion funding for local authorities to support small businesses that already pay little or no business rates because of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR). This will provide a one-off grant of £3,000 to businesses currently eligible for SBRR or Rural Rate Relief, to help meet their ongoing business costs.



Q18: I think I will need a loan to get through the next few months

A new temporary Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, delivered by the British Business Bank, will launch in a matter of weeks to support businesses to access bank lending and overdrafts.

The government will provide lenders with a guarantee of 80% on each loan (subject to a per-lender cap on claims) to give lenders further confidence in continuing to provide finance to SMEs.

The government will not charge businesses or banks for this guarantee, and the Scheme will support loans of up to £1.2 million in value. This new guarantee will initially support up to £1 billion of lending on top of current support offered through the British Business Bank.

Q19: Can I delay paying my tax bill to HMRC?

All businesses and self-employed people in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, may be eligible to receive support with their tax affairs through HMRC's 'Time To Pay' service. These arrangements are agreed on a case-by-case basis and are tailored to individual circumstances and liabilities.

If you are concerned about being able to pay your tax due to COVID-19, call HMRC's dedicated helpline on 0800 0159 559.

Useful Links

This is a fast developing situation and some of the answers above may change. Below are some useful links to help keep up to date

ACAS

UK Government latest update

UK Government advice to employers

UK Government foreign travel advice

NHS

WHO Coronavirus outbreak

WHO advice for employers

The contents of this guidance is not intended to serve as legal advice related to individual situations or as legal opinions concerning such situations, nor should they be considered a substitute for taking legal advice.

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