

Coronavirus: advice for employers and employees

In case coronavirus (COVID-19) spreads more widely in the UK, employers should consider some simple steps to help protect the health and safety of staff.

It's good practice for employers to:

- keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure in the workplace
- make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date
- make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus and are clear on any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace develops the virus
- make sure there are clean places to wash hands with hot water and soap, and encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly
- give out hand sanitisers and tissues to staff, and encourage them to use them
- consider if protective face masks might help for people working in particularly vulnerable situations
- consider if any travel planned to affected areas is essential

An employer must not single anyone out. For example, it cannot treat an employee differently simply because of their race or ethnicity.

Sick pay

The workplace's usual sick leave and pay entitlements apply if someone has coronavirus.

Employees should let their employer know as soon as possible if they're not able to go to work.

The employer might need to make allowances if their workplace sickness policy requires evidence from the employee. For example, the employee might not be able to get a sick note ('fit note') if they've been told to self-isolate for 14 days.

If someone is not sick but cannot work because they're in self-isolation or quarantine

There's no legal ('statutory') right to pay if someone is not sick but cannot work because they:

- have been told by a medical expert to self-isolate
- have had to go into quarantine
- are abroad in an affected area and are not allowed to travel back to the UK

But it's good practice for their employer to treat it as sick leave and follow their usual sick pay policy or agree for the time to be taken as holiday. Otherwise there's a risk the employee will come to work because they want to get paid. They could then spread the virus, if they have it.

The employee must tell their employer as soon as possible if they cannot work. It's helpful to let the employer know the reason and how long they are likely to be off for.

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 should get their usual pay. For example, if someone has returned from China or another affected area and their employer asks them not to come in.

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 for 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.

The amount of time off an employee takes to look after someone must be reasonable for the situation. For example, they might take 2 days off to start with, and if more time is needed, they can book holiday.

Find out more about:

- [sick pay](#)
- [time off for dependants](#)

If employees do not want to go to work

Some people might feel they do not want to go to work if they're afraid of catching coronavirus.

An employer should listen to any concerns staff may have.

If there are genuine concerns, the employer must try to resolve them to protect the health and safety of their staff. For example, if possible, the employer could offer flexible working.

If an employee still does not want to go in, they may be able to arrange with their employer to take the time off as holiday or unpaid leave. The employer does not have to agree to this.

If an employee refuses to attend work, it could result in disciplinary action.

[Find out more about absence from work.](#)

If someone becomes unwell at work

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace and has 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:

- for NHS advice: 111
- for an ambulance, if they're seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk: 999

They should tell the operator:

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

If someone with coronavirus comes to work

If someone with 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

Find your local PHE health protection team on GOV.UK.

If the employer needs to close the workplace

Currently it's very unlikely that an employer will need to close their workplace.

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

Where work can be done at home, the employer could:

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

In some situations, an employer might need to close down their business for a short time. Unless it says in the contract or is agreed otherwise, they still need to pay their employees for this time.

If the employer thinks they'll need to do this, it's important to talk with staff as early as possible and throughout the closure.

Source: ACAS
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