

**COVID-19: Employers Factsheet**

This is a worrying time for both employees and employers, so we have pulled together some key points around how to manage the threat of COVID-19.

It is best practice for employers to do the following:

- keep everyone informed on what actions the company is taking to reduce the risks of exposure in the workplace
- ensure all employees personal details are up to date including their emergency contacts
- make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus and are clear on any relevant processes, e.g. sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace starts showing symptoms
- Provide the facilities for all employees to wash hands with hot water and soap, and encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly
- provide hand sanitiser and tissues for employees
- make plans in case of a temporary shut-down for example working from home, divert telephone calls

**Some frequently asked questions:**

<b>Q</b>	<b>What happens if an employee is off sick with the coronavirus?</b>
	<p>This should be dealt as you would normally under the company sickness absence policy and procedures. SSP will be due from day one to those employees that have to self-isolate if they:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have coronavirus</li> <li>2. Have coronavirus symptoms (high temperature or a new continuous cough)</li> <li>3. Have been told by a doctor or NHS 111 to self-isolate</li> </ol> <p>SSP will be reclaimable via your payroll / PAYE</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>Do we need to see a doctor’s certificate as evidence?</b>
	<p>You only require medical evidence after an employee has been ill for more than 7 days. However, the government are advising employers to use their discretion around the need for medical evidence during this time especially as patients are being asked to not attend surgeries at this time.</p>

<b>Q</b>	<b>What is the current advice re SSP and reclaiming this from the government?</b>
	<p>The government have declared that they will allow small and medium sized businesses and employers (less than 250 employees) to reclaim SSP for sickness absence due to COVID-19. The refund will cover up to 2 weeks SSP per eligible employee.</p> <p>The government will be releasing further information over the next few months on how this can be reclaimed.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>My employee has self-isolated – do I need to pay them?</b>
	If your employee meets the government criteria, then you should treat this as sickness absence and pay SSP from day 1.
<b>Q</b>	<b>My employee is off as they need to care for someone who is a high risk or sick – do I need to pay them?</b>
	This should be treated as dependant leave which means your entitled to unpaid time off to care for that individual.
<b>Q</b>	<b>Employees are worried and wants to go home but we are still operating business as usual – what do we do?</b>
	<p>You should talk to them on an indivual basis to try and understand their concerns. Where possible, we advise that you encourage team members to work from home and consider flexible working rather than taking a leave of absence. Alternatively, you could consider their request by offering the opportunity to take this time as holiday or unpaid time off.</p> <p>As an employer you do not have to agree to flexible working and if an employee refuses to work then this could result in disciplinary action.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What do we do if an employee doesn't turn up for work and doesn't call in?</b>
	<p>Try and make contact via telephone and email as you would do normally and advise them that if you don't hear from them with 24 hours then this will be treated as unauthorised absence and will be dealt with in line with disciplinary procedures.</p> <p>Pure HR can help to draft a letter as required.</p>

<b>Q</b>	<b>We want to make contractual changes due to the threat of the coronavirus – is this possible?</b>
	<p>You are obliged to offer employees work as detailed in the contract of employment and if employees are willing to work then they should be paid as per the terms set out.</p> <p>If you wish to enforce contractual changes (e.g. shorter working hours for a set period, alternative shifts) then this will need to be done with the consent of your employees. If they do not agree then you will be obliged to pay them as per the contract of employment regardless of the hours worked.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What happens if we need to close the workplace?</b>
	<p>Employees will need to be paid during this time as this is a contractual requirement. However alternative options to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working from home (including working from laptops, mobile phones, dialling in for meetings, taking paperwork home or completing training)</li> <li>• Requesting employees to use this as holiday – this should be communicated ahead of the closed, recommended advise is twice as many days in advance as the number they will be required to use. E.g. If you want to close for 5 days then employees should be told 10 days in advance</li> <li>• If you have a clause in your contract that covers “Short term working and layoffs” then you may be able to apply this however we urge to tread carefully in these cases as it could lead to constructive dismissal claims. Please get in touch and discuss this in more detail if you wish to enforce this clause.</li> </ul>
<b>Q</b>	<b>Is there anything I need to do if employees do start working from home?</b>
	<p>Ensure they have the facilities to work from home and provide addition equipment where possible e.g. mobile phone, additional screens. Ask employees to carry out a Display Screen Risk Assessment to ensure the space they are using to work from home meets the recommended guidelines.</p> <p><a href="https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/assessment.htm">https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/assessment.htm</a></p> <p>You should also consider setting out how employees should communicate with line managers and colleagues during this time.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>We can’t sustain a downturn in business – what will happen to our employees?</b>
	<p>If your business is affected and you need to consider making redundancies then please get in touch and we will help you to plan and ensure you are fulfilling your legal obligations and carry out the process in the best way possible.</p>

**For further advise please visit**

Government website pages: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

Acas : <https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>

**\*\*This information is correct as of 17/03/2020 any major developments/changed will be communicated\*\***