

Coronavirus: advice for employers

This advice is being reviewed daily and this is the guidance as at 19 March 2020.

Employers should consider some simple steps to help protect the health and safety of everyone during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

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
- consider extra precautions for staff who might be more vulnerable, for example if someone is pregnant, aged 70 or over, or has a long-term health condition
- 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 shows symptoms of the virus
- make sure there are clean places to wash hands with hot water and soap, and encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly
- provide hand sanitiser and tissues for staff, and encourage them to use them
- consider if any travel or meetings are necessary and if meetings can be held remotely instead
- keep up to date with the [latest government coronavirus advice on GOV.UK](#)

Employers must not single anyone out unfairly. For example, they must not treat an employee differently because of their race or ethnicity.

Self-isolation and sick pay

Employees and workers must receive any [Statutory Sick Pay \(SSP\)](#) due to them if they need to self-isolate because:

- they have coronavirus
- they have coronavirus symptoms, for example a high temperature or new continuous cough
- someone in their household has coronavirus symptoms
- they've been told to self-isolate by a doctor or NHS 111

If someone has symptoms and lives alone, they must self-isolate for 7 days. If someone lives in a household and is the first to have symptoms, they must self-isolate for 7 days. Everyone else in their household must self-isolate for 14 days.

If anyone else in the household starts displaying symptoms, the person with the new symptoms must self-isolate for 7 days. This is regardless of where they are in the 14-day isolation period.

[Find more guidance for households with possible coronavirus on GOV.UK.](#)

Employers might offer more than SSP – 'contractual' sick pay.

[Find out more about sick pay.](#)

If an employee or worker cannot work, they should tell their employer:

- as soon as possible
- the reason
- how long they're likely to be off for

The employer might need to be flexible if they require evidence from the employee or worker. For example, someone might not be able to provide a [sick note \('fit note'\)](#) if they've been told to self-isolate for more than 7 days.

[Find advice about self-isolating on NHS.UK.](#)

Social distancing, flexible working and working from home

Current government advice is for everyone to try and stop unnecessary contact with other people – 'social distancing'. This includes:

- working from home where possible
- avoiding busy commuting times on public transport
- avoiding gatherings of people, whether in public, at work or at home

Employers should support their workforce to take these steps. This might include:

- agreeing to more flexible ways of working, for example changing start and finish times to avoid busier commuting times
- allowing staff to work from home wherever possible
- cancelling face-to-face events and meetings and rearranging to remote calling where possible, for example using video or conference calling technology

Vulnerable people

Employers need to be especially careful and take extra steps for anyone in their workforce who is at increased risk from coronavirus.

They include, but are not limited to, those who:

- have a long-term health condition, for example asthma, diabetes or heart disease, or a weakened immune system as the result of medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- are pregnant
- are aged 70 or over
- care for someone with a health condition that might put them at a greater risk

[Find out more about social distancing and vulnerable people on GOV.UK.](#)

Working from home

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

If an employer and employee agree to working from home, the employer should:

- pay the employee as usual
- keep in regular contact
- check on the employee's health and wellbeing

Find out more about:

- [homeworking](#)
- [health and safety for homeworking on the HSE website](#)

If an employee does 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. This could particularly be the case for those who are at higher risk.

An employer should listen to any concerns staff may have and should take steps to protect everyone.

For example, they could offer extra car parking where possible so that people can avoid using public transport.

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 without a valid reason, it could result in [disciplinary action](#).

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

If the employer needs to close the workplace

An employer may want to plan in case they need to close the workplace temporarily.

This might be a difficult time for both employers and staff. It's a good idea to make sure staff have a way to communicate with the employer and other people they work with.

Lay-offs and short-time working

In some situations, an employer might need to close down their business for a short time, or ask staff to reduce their contracted hours.

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.

Unless it says in the contract or is agreed otherwise, they still need to pay their employees for this time.

Employees who are laid off and are not entitled to their usual pay might be entitled to a 'statutory guarantee payment' of up to £29 a day from their employer.

This is limited to a maximum of 5 days in any period of 3 months. On days when a guarantee payment is not payable, employees might be able to claim Jobseekers Allowance from Jobcentre Plus.

Find out more about:

- [lay-offs and short-time working](#)
- [your nearest Jobcentre Plus on GOV.UK](#)

Using holiday

Employers have the right to tell employees and workers when to take holiday if they need to. For example, they can decide to shut for a week and everyone has to use their holiday entitlement.

If the employer does decide to do this, they must tell staff at least twice as many days before as the amount of days they need people to take.

For example, if they want to close for 5 days, they should tell everyone at least 10 days before.

This could affect holiday staff have already booked or planned. So employers should:

- explain clearly why they need to close
- try and resolve anyone's worries about how it will affect their holiday entitlement or plans

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 could apply to situations to do with coronavirus.

A dependant does not necessarily live with the person, for example they could be an elderly neighbour or relative who relies on the person for help.

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.

If a dependant such as a partner, child or relative in the same household gets coronavirus symptoms, they should receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) as a minimum for this time. They'll also need to follow [self-isolation guidance on GOV.UK](#).

School closures

As schools in England, Scotland and Wales will be closing, this will have an impact on care and working arrangements. This may be an anxious time for parents, and employers will need to be planning cover at work.

School closures continued

If employees need emergency time off for child care or to make new arrangements, they can use:

- time off to care for someone else
- holiday, if their employer agrees

Employers and employees can consider these steps:

- talking to each other early on about time off that might be needed
- agreeing regular conversations so both can plan ahead
- agreeing flexible working instead of taking longer periods of time off, for example working from home or changing working hours to allow for child care

If any agreement is made, it's a good idea for it to be in writing.

If someone has coronavirus symptoms at work

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace with coronavirus symptoms, they should:

- tell their employer immediately and go home
- 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 must self-isolate at home for 14 days if they live with others, or 7 days if they live alone.

You can get more advice or help by either:

- [using the NHS 111 coronavirus service website](#)
- calling 111, if you cannot access the NHS website
- calling 999, if someone is seriously ill or life is at risk

It's best for the unwell person to use their own mobile phone or computer to access these services.

If someone with coronavirus comes to work

If someone with coronavirus comes to work, the workplace does not necessarily have to close, but they should follow cleaning advice.

The ACAS website provides information relating to staffing and is kept updated.
<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>

As always we are here to help and support. If you have any questions in relation to payroll please do not hesitate to contact Gall Robertson CA either by phone or email.

In line with social distancing, we are no longer having clients coming to the office.

There will be staff available to assist in any enquiries you have.