

Coronavirus: advice for employers and employees

This advice is being reviewed daily. We're monitoring government updates and when legal changes happen, we will update this page.

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 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
- reconsider any travel to affected areas

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

Self-isolation and sick pay

The government has stated that an employee or worker should receive any [Statutory Sick Pay \(SSP\)](#) due to them if they need to self-isolate because:

- they have coronavirus (usually 14 days of self-isolation)
- they have a high temperature or new continuous cough (usually 7

days of self-isolation)

- they've been told to self-isolate by a doctor or NHS 111

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 14 days.

If someone returns from an affected area

Anyone returning from an affected area, for example China or Italy, should self-isolate and call NHS 111.

Their employer should pay them Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or contractual sick pay while they're in self-isolation and cannot work.

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

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.

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 time off for dependants.](#)

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.

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 with coronavirus symptoms, 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
- 999, if they're seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk

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 out more about PHE health protection teams on GOV.UK.](#)

The process may be different in Scotland and Wales. For more advice, see:

- [Health Protection Scotland \(HPS\)](#)
- [Welsh Government](#)

If the employer needs to close the workplace

An employer may want to plan in case they need to close the workplace temporarily. For example, making sure staff have a way to communicate with the employer and other people they work with.

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

[Find out more about homeworking.](#)

Lay-offs and short-time working

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.

[Find out more about lay-offs and short-time working.](#)

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

More about coronavirus

- [coronavirus on NHS.UK](#)
- [latest coronavirus information and advice on GOV.UK](#)