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Guidance

Guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)

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Contents

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What you need to know

- businesses and workplaces should encourage their employees to work at home, wherever possible
- if someone becomes unwell in the workplace with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should be sent home and advised to follow the advice to stay at home
- employees should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues
- frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products
- employees will need your support to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to others
- those who follow advice to stay at home will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) from the first day of their absence from work
- employers should use their discretion concerning the need for medical evidence for certification for employees who are unwell. This will allow GPs to focus on their patients
- if evidence is required by an employer, those with symptoms of coronavirus can get an isolation note from NHS 111 online (https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19), and those who live with someone that has symptoms can get a note from the NHS website (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/)
- employees from defined vulnerable groups (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people) should be strongly advised and supported to stay at home and work from there if possible

Background

This guidance will assist employers, businesses and their staff in addressing coronavirus (COVID-19).

This guidance may be updated in line with the changing situation.

It's good practice for employers to:

- keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure in the workplace
- ensure employees who are in a vulnerable group are strongly advised to follow social distancing guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults)
- make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date
- make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and are clear on any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace is potentially infected and needs to take the appropriate action
- make sure there are places to wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and encourage everyone to do so regularly
- provide hand sanitiser and tissues for staff, and encourage them to use them

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new, continuous cough or a high temperature.

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild infection.

What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) on site

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance).

If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (https://111.nhs.uk/) or call 111 if they don't have internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the government response page (https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response) for the latest details.

Travel arrangements

Anyone who has a new, continuous cough or a high temperature should be advised to quickly and directly return home and to remain there and initiate household isolation. If they have to use public transport, they should try to keep away from other people and catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue.

Sick pay

Those who follow advice to stay at home and who cannot work as a result will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP), even if they are not themselves sick.

Employers should use their discretion and respect the medical need to self-isolate in making decisions about sick pay.

Anyone not eligible to receive sick pay, including those earning less than an average of £118 per week, some of those working in the gig economy, or self-employed people, is able to claim Universal Credit (https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/) and or contributory Employment and Support Allowance.

For those on a low income and already claiming Universal Credit, it is designed to automatically adjust depending on people's earnings or other income. However, if someone needs money urgently they can apply for an advance through the journal.

Certifying absence from work

By law, medical evidence is not required for the first 7 days of sickness. After 7 days, employers may use their discretion around the need for medical evidence if an employee is staying at home.

We strongly suggest that employers use their discretion around the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to stay at home either as they are unwell themselves, or live with someone who is, in accordance with the public health advice issued by the government.

If evidence is required to cover self-isolation or household isolation (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection) beyond the first 7 days of absence then employees can get an isolation note from NHS 111 online (https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19) or from the NHS website (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/).

What to do 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 related to coronavirus (COVID-19). 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.

ACAS has more information on coronavirus (https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus) and can help with specific queries by phone.

Limiting spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in business and workplaces

Businesses and employers can help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by reminding everyone of the public health advice. Posters, leaflets and other materials (https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/101/resources/5016) are available.

Employees and customers should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently than normal.

Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.

Cleaning and waste

See the guidance on cleaning and waste (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings).

Handling post or packages

Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working; there are no additional precautions needed for handling post or packages.