

## **Coronavirus Q&A**

### **What is Coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are transmitted between animals and people. This can cause a range of illnesses such as the common cold to respiratory syndromes.

Covid-19 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not previously been identified in humans.

### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

- High temperature or fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness
- Aches and pains
- Nasal congestion

The main symptoms that the NHS guidance are focusing on are high temperature above 37.8 and a new continuous cough.

### **How to avoid spreading or catching COVID-19:**

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds
- Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, bin the tissue immediately and wash hands
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are showing symptoms such as coughing or sneezing
- Cook eggs and meat thoroughly
- Do not touch your eyes or mouth with unwashed hands

### **How to avoid spreading or catching COVID-19 in the workplace:**

- Minimise unnecessary contact with clients and employees
- Try to avoid site visits and client visits, if possible hold Skype or conference calls
- Promote catch it, bin it, kill it with posters
- Encourage the employee to follow the steps above
- Provide the employees with hand sanitisers and tissues
- Increase cleaning facilities
- Swap hand towels for paper towels/tissues

### **Is there any treatment or cure for COVID-19?**

There is currently no treatment or cure for the virus. Antibiotics do not work against viruses.

**An employee has said they have a high temperature and/or a new cough, should they self-isolate?**

Yes, if a worker informs you that they have a high temperature and/or a new cough they should self-isolate for 7 days. If the employee continues to have these symptoms after 7 days they should contact NHS 111 or use their online service.

**What should I pay them?**

Statutory Sick pay would apply for the period of self-isolation.

**When can the employee return to work?**

If after 7 days the symptoms have gone the employee is entitled to return to work and no longer needs to self-isolate.

**What do we do if an employee starts to display fever like symptoms at work?**

If a worker becomes unwell whilst at work they should go home and self-isolate and follow the guidance from the NHS 111.

The person who is unwell should avoid touching other people or any surfaces, including door handles.

Once the employee has left the workplace a deep clean of the office should be implemented.

**If the Government announces that they will be closing schools and parent employees are unable to come into work or work from home, what should we do and will they be paid?**

If possible, you could ask the employee to work from home, the employee will be entitled to their normal pay during this time.

If working from home is not possible this will be granted as dependant leave, the employee will not be entitled to pay during this time. Alternatively, the employee can use their annual leave during their time off.

**A parent/guardian employee has been informed their children's school has been closed because there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 at the school, can we ask the employee to come into work?**

The employee should self-isolate for 14 days. If they can work from home normal pay would apply, if they are unable to work from home then this will be classed as sickness and Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) would apply. This is currently £94.25 per week. SSP is paid from day 1 of the absence instead of day 4 (COVID-19 only), if you have 250 employees or less you will be able to claim the sick pay back from the Government.

The employee can request annual leave for this period.

### **What is the current threat level?**

The Government has announced as of Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March the threat level has increased **High**.

### **An employee has asked to self-isolate, but they don't have any symptoms and have not been advised by a medical professional. What can we do?**

Employees who want to self-isolate without symptoms and without the employer's consent could be requested to attend work by their employer. However, you should speak to the employee to understand why they want to self-isolate and if this is because of underlying health conditions, including mental health. Employers should take the concerns seriously.

If the employer is in agreement with the employee and have allowed them to self-isolate without displaying any symptoms, this will be granted as unpaid leave.

### **Does the employee need a medical certificate for the period of self-isolation?**

The Government has announced that in the next couple of weeks they will be introducing a change in how to obtain a fit note, this means that when an employee is advised to self-isolate by a medical professional they will be able to obtain documentation from NHS 111 to use as evidence for their absence.

Currently an employee is still entitled to self-certify for the first seven days, after seven days the employers should assess each case individually and use discretion, the employers must also understand that the employee has been advised to self-isolate and wouldn't be able to attend the doctors to obtain a fit note.

### **Can we cancel an employees holiday if they are planning on going to a high risk area?**

The employee needs to frequently check the Government website for any updates and travel advice for high risk areas.

Employers can cancel the employees annual leave but they must provide them with the minimum notice period. The notice period is usually twice as long as the amount of leave that has been granted. For example, an employees granted leave is 1 week, you will need to provide the employee with 2 weeks' notice at a minimum.

Requests to avoid travel and not attend work should apply to all staff regardless of ethnicity or nationality.

If the employee is at a financial loss because the employer has cancelled their holiday then the employer should consider offering financial compensation.

### **Can we ask employees to disclose where they are going on their annual leave?**

Yes, the employer can ask the member of staff to disclose where they are going on holiday. However, the employee can't be held to threat of disciplinary action should they not want to disclose this information.

Explain to the employee that travel advice is changing daily and if they go to a high risk area they may be required to self-isolate by NHS111 upon their returned.

Due to the changing advice from the Government an employee should take into consideration that if they go on holiday to a high risk area their return flight may be affected.

### **Can an employee cancel their annual leave?**

- The employer if they wish can grant the request to cancel annual leave but this should be confirmed in writing by both parties. If the annual leave is cancelled the employee is entitled to take their leave at another time within.
- Employers can request the employee to continue to take their annual leave as scheduled.

If your employee is at the end of their leave year then they may be entitled to carry this over to the following year.

### **An employee has booked annual leave to go on a cruise, should they still go?**

Travel advice is changing daily but currently the Government has advised again all travel on cruise ships if a person is over 70 years old and for those who have underlying health conditions.

### **I have a pregnant employee, is she a higher risk catching COVID-19 and should she still continue to work?**

There is currently no evidence to say that pregnant women are at higher risk for contracting the virus. However, if the pregnant employee is concerned about coming into work then these concerns should be listened to.

Consider if the employee can work from home, if so they will receive their normal pay. If she's not able to work from home then you may want to grant unpaid leave or offer annual leave.

### **How long is self-isolation?**

7 days for those who **haven't** been exposed to a confirmed case and have mild symptoms of COVID-19, including a high temperature and/ or a cough. Most people will no longer be likely to transmit the virus 7 days after the start of the symptoms. If the symptoms continue after 7 days the employee should continue to self-isolate and contact NHS 111.

If the employee has mild symptoms and haven't been exposed to a confirmed case they **do not** have to contact NHS 111 however, SSP will still apply in this case.

14 days for those who have been exposed to a confirmed case even if they do not show any symptoms.

### **Do we need to close the workplace if an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19?**

The advice so far from Public Health England (PHE) is no, PHE will be in contact and advise accordingly, they should come to the workplace to do a risk assessment. Based on the findings of the risk assessment they will advise if closure is necessary or if the a deep clean is required.



Employers need to be mindful of vulnerable people during this time and to consider a more flexible working arrangement.

**Can I request employees to work from home and close the workplace even without the Governments advise?**

Yes, you can request the employee to work from home however, they will be paid the normal pay.

**What if my business suffers a reduction in footfall and I can't afford to keep it open?**

If an employee isn't able to work from home, then you could implement short time working or lay off as long as this is within the employees contract. If the business is unable to continue to operate completely then the employer may start to look at redundancies as a last resort.