

# Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice for employers and employees

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

## 1. Vulnerable people

The government has issued guidance that strongly advises people who are at a higher risk of catching coronavirus ('vulnerable people') to take strict social distancing measures.

Employers must be especially careful and take extra steps for anyone in their workforce who is in a vulnerable group. 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.](#)

## Shielding for extremely vulnerable people

Some people will receive a letter from the NHS to say they must take extra steps to protect (or 'shield') themselves because of an underlying health condition. This is for people who are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus.

If an employee receives a letter telling them to start shielding, they will need to stay at home for at least 12 weeks.

Employees should talk to their employer as soon as they can if they:

- have been told to start shielding
- think they might get a letter telling them to start shielding

Employers should support staff following shielding guidelines. This might be a distressing or difficult time, so it's important for employers to [keep in touch during any absence](#).

Any details about the employee's medical condition must be kept confidential, unless the employee says it can be shared.

[Read more about shielding measures 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:

- [working from home](#)
- [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.](#)

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

Find more advice about self-isolating:

- in England, [NHS.UK](#)
- in Wales, [NHS Direct Wales](#)
- in Scotland, [NHS Inform for Scotland](#)

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

## If the employer needs proof

Employees in self-isolation need to follow their workplace's usual sickness reporting process.

Employees can 'self-certify' for the first 7 days off work. This means following their workplace process but not having to get a note from a doctor or NHS 111.

Those self-isolating due to coronavirus for more than 7 days can get an online self-isolation note from the:

- [NHS website](#)
- [NHS mobile phone app](#)

It's a good idea to check your workplace's policy on absence from work. Employers might need to be flexible if asking for self-isolation notes. For example, an employee with severe symptoms might not be able to get a note straightaway.

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

Some employers have been instructed to close by the government. This includes cafés, pubs, restaurants, leisure centres, cinemas and theatres.

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.

### 3. Government financial support

The government is providing financial support for employers affected by coronavirus disruption.

#### **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme**

The government will be introducing the 'Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme'. This means employers can access financial support to continue paying the wages of employees who are temporarily sent home because there's no work. These staff are called 'furloughed' workers.

To access the scheme, employers will need to designate relevant staff as furloughed workers. The employer needs to get agreement from the worker to do this, unless it's covered by a clause in the employment contract.

Any furlough agreements should be in writing. It's a good idea to include:

- the date furlough starts
- when it will be reviewed
- how to keep in contact during furlough

A worker will stay employed while they are furloughed, but they must not work.

HMRC (HM Revenue & Customs) will reimburse 80% of furloughed workers wage costs to employers, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. Employers will be able to make a claim for the money once HMRC's new system is available.

If employers need short term cash flow support, they may be eligible for a 'Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan'.

[Find out more about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and other financial support on GOV.UK.](#)

### 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 Jobseeker's 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

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[/checking-holiday-entitlement](#)

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](#).

[Find out more about time off for dependants.](#)

## 4. School closures

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

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

- time off to care for someone else (['time off for dependants'](#))
- 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.

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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

If the unwell person lives alone, they must self-isolate for 7 days. If they live with others 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.

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.

## 5. 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.

[See advice for cleaning workplaces on GOV.UK.](#)

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:

- be especially careful and take extra steps for vulnerable groups, including those who are pregnant, aged 70 or over, or who have a long-term health condition
- hold meetings as remote calls and avoid travel as much as possible
- 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
- make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date
- keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure in the workplace
- keep up to date with the [latest government coronavirus advice on GOV.UK](#)

## 6. Avoiding discrimination

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

They should look out for any bullying, discrimination or harassment happening in their workplace and address it immediately.

[Find out more about discrimination, bullying and harassment.](#)

Related content

[Latest government coronavirus advice on GOV.UK](#)

To get more coronavirus advice, you can:

- [find coronavirus advice on NHS.UK](#)
- [see latest coronavirus information and advice on GOV.UK](#)
- [see guidance for employers and businesses on GOV.UK](#)
- [sign up for Acas's coronavirus webinar for employers](#)
- [join our live Twitter coronavirus Q&A sessions every Friday at 10:30am](#)

If you live in Scotland or Wales, keep up to date with your government's coronavirus advice on the websites for the:

- [Scottish Government](#)

- [Welsh Government](#)