

Coronavirus Advice for Employers – 27 February 2020

The new coronavirus disease was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation. The virus continues to spread; 40 countries now having confirmed cases of the virus.

How should Employers respond to this threat?

- Look after your employees health, safety and wellbeing. Employers have a statutory duty of care for people's health and safety and to provide a safe place to work.
- Take precautions for employees returning from travel, particularly from affected countries.
- Consider if any travel planned to affected areas is essential.
- Develop flexible resourcing plans, consider how your organisation could operate with reduced staffing.
- Ensure you have up to date contact numbers for your employees and contact numbers for your employees emergency contacts
- Provide hand sanitisers and encourage their use.
- Consider if protective faces masks may help people working in a particularly vulnerable situation.

Symptoms of coronavirus detailed by the World Health Organisation are:

- A cough
- A high temperature
- Shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.
- Note: these symptoms do not necessarily mean you have the illness. The symptoms are similar to other illnesses that are much more common such as cold and flu.

Recommendations to prevent infection:

This virus is spread from people who have the virus. This can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth when a person with the virus coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch the virus by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth

Standard recommendations to prevent infection spread include regular hand washing, covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, thoroughly cooking meat and eggs. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing.

Sick Reporting and Pay

Normal sickness absence policies and procedures may still apply. Employers should however consider making allowances and provide flexibility to each situation. For example, it may not be possible for an employee to obtain a fit note (sick note) from their doctor if they have been advised to self-isolate. There is more about self-isolating on the government website. [Find out more about self-isolating on GOV.UK.](#)

If an employee has been advised to self-isolate, but they are not sick, there is no legal right to pay. Employers may wish to consider doing so to prevent such an employee coming into work because they want to get paid.

If an employee is not sick but the employer tells them not to come into work employees should get their usual pay. For example, if someone has returned from China or another affected area and their employer asks them not to come in. In such circumstances an employer is entitled and may wish to request an employee to work from home (if appropriate) or perhaps undertake online learning.

Example and Practical Management Advice

Earlier this week, one of our clients contacted us regarding one of their employees who has just returned to the office after half-term away in Northern Italy. They returned to work yesterday only to realise today that the area they left has now been locked down due to the Coronavirus.

The employee and our client took immediate action, they called the NHS non-urgent helpline and the employee was advised (despite not showing any symptoms) to go home and self-isolate for 14 days. In this particular business, the employee can work from home.

We have spent several hours being passed from Public Health England and the NHS line to determine the best course of action to prevent COVID-19 from causing disruption to the business.

Here is their advice:

- ✦ You must check with employees who have been away on holiday where they've been and consult the latest advice from professional bodies such as WHO, the NHS and PHE.
- ✦ Any employee coming back from any of the affected areas should not come back into work but must self-isolate for 14 days straight away.
- ✦ The affected areas are changing on a daily basis so make the best decision you can at the time, using the information to hand.
- ✦ Self-isolation means not coming into work, going to the shops, the GP or having any contact with anyone other than close family members (you can only control them not coming into work).
- ✦ Keep in touch on a daily basis with any self-isolated employee and check that they haven't developed symptoms. You can also use this time to check in with any work that they're carrying out.
- ✦ If a self-isolated employee becomes unwell, they must not go to a GP, instead, they must ring 111 and be guided by them. They will be given further information at that point.
- ✦ If any employee shows signs of a high fever and a cough, they must call 111 and take advice. They should not go to a GP or A&E.

Further Support

If you have questions regarding how to manage employees who cannot come to work due to isolation, do message me.

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