

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

Current government advice is for everyone to stay at home, except in specific situations.

This includes:

- only going outside for food, health reasons or work (where this absolutely cannot be done from home)
- staying 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people ('social distancing')
- avoiding busy commuting times on public transport where travel is essential
- washing your hands as soon as you get home

Employers should support their workforce to take these steps. This might include agreeing more flexible ways of working.

For full guidance on staying at home, see:

- [latest coronavirus information and advice on GOV.UK](#)
- [Scottish Government coronavirus guidance](#)
- [Welsh Government coronavirus guidance](#)

1. Working from home

For any employee 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.](#)

The government advises anyone who's at high risk of getting a severe illness if they catch coronavirus ('vulnerable people') to take particularly strict social distancing measures.

Although everyone is advised to practise social distancing, it's particularly important for those in a vulnerable group.

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.](#)

[Find advice on pregnancy and coronavirus on the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' website.](#)

2. Shielding for extremely vulnerable people

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

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

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

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.](#)

Discrimination and unfair treatment

If an employee is still being asked to go out to work and they believe they're at risk because they're in one of the vulnerable groups, it's important they talk to their employer.

If they cannot follow guidance on social distancing at work or during travel to work, they should tell their employer they need to follow government advice and stay at home.

Unfair treatment and dismissal

An employee is protected by law against unfair treatment and dismissal, if it's because of:

- pregnancy
- age
- a health condition that's considered a disability under the Equality Act

It does not matter how long they've worked for the employer.

It could be unlawful discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, disability or age if an employer either:

- unreasonably tries to pressure someone to go to work
- unreasonably disciplines someone for not going to work

[Find out about dealing with a workplace problem.](#)

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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.

Read more about:

- [guidance for households with possible coronavirus on GOV.UK](#)
- [Welsh Government guidance for households](#)

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

3. 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](#) – for those registered with a GP in England
- [NHS Direct Wales](#) – use the coronavirus symptom checker

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 straight away.

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All non-essential premises must now close. This includes cafés, pubs, restaurants, leisure centres, cinemas, theatres, and electronics and clothing shops.

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.

The government will be providing financial support for:

- employees who are temporarily sent home because there's no work ('furloughed workers')
- self-employed workers

4. Financial support for furloughed workers

Financial support for furloughed workers will be provided to employers through the 'Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme'.

This scheme is available to employers who use PAYE payroll from 28 February 2020. This may include:

- employees
- workers
- those who do casual work
- those who have zero-hours contracts

Eligibility

To be eligible for the scheme, employers will need to:

- select and tell ('designate') the employees affected that they're furloughed
- keep employees on the employer's payroll
- make sure furloughs last at least 3 weeks

If someone was made redundant on or after 28 February 2020

An employer can decide to rehire them and put them on furlough.

If someone has more than one job

Each job is treated separately. This means they may be able to either:

- continue to work for their other job
- be furloughed for both jobs

If they're furloughed for both jobs, they'll be eligible for financial support for each job.

Selecting and telling affected employees

Employers must select employees for furlough in a fair way to avoid any discrimination.

They also need to get agreement from the employee to do this, unless it's covered by a clause in the employment contract. They need to clearly explain how much the employee will get paid in total.

The government will pay employers 80% of wages. The employer should decide whether they'll top up the wages to 100%, but they do not have to. If the employer decides not to top up the wages, they should tell the employee and explain why not.

If an employee disagrees with their employer's decision, they'll need to talk to their employer and try to come to an agreement.

Changing an employment contract

If an employer cannot reach an agreement, they may want to change the written terms in an employee's contract.

If there are more than 20 employees affected, employers will need to consult staff representatives ('collectively consult').

[Find out more about changing an employment contract.](#)

Furlough agreements

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

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

[Download a furlough letter template.](#)

Financial support

HMRC (HM Revenue & Customs) will reimburse 80% of furloughed workers' wage costs to employers, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month.

Payments will be made every 3 weeks. This is because 3 weeks is the shortest period a furlough can last.

Employers will be able to make a claim for the money once HMRC's new system is available. Claims can be backdated to 1 March 2020.

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

As this is a new scheme and the details are still being finalised, the Acas helpline will not be able to give further information.

Find out more about:

- [claiming for wage costs through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme on GOV.UK](#)
- [support for businesses through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme on GOV.UK](#)

Financial support for self-employed workers

Financial support will be provided to self-employed workers through the 'Self-Employed Income Support Scheme'.

Self-employed workers will receive a taxable grant of 80% of their average monthly income, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month.

HMRC will contact self-employed workers directly if they're eligible for the scheme.

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 £30 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 for a temporary workplace closure

Employers have the right to tell employees and workers when to take holiday if they need to.

An employer could, for example, shut for a week and tell everyone to use their holiday entitlement.

[Find out more about using holiday.](#)

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In most situations, employees and workers should use their paid holiday ('statutory annual leave') in their current leave year. This is 5.6 weeks in the UK.

This is important because taking holiday helps people:

- get enough rest
- keep healthy (physically and mentally)

If an employee is 'furloughed' (temporarily sent home because there's no work), they can still request and take their holiday in the usual way. This includes taking bank holidays.

5. Carrying over holiday

During the coronavirus outbreak, it may not be possible for staff to take all their holiday entitlement during the current holiday year.

Employers should still be encouraging workers and employees to take their paid holiday. Employees and workers should also make requests for paid holiday throughout their holiday year, if possible.

The government has introduced a temporary new law allowing employees and workers to carry over up to 4 weeks' paid holiday over a 2-year period. This law applies for any holiday the employee does not take because of coronavirus, for example if:

- they're self-isolating or too sick to take holiday before the end of their leave year
- they've been temporarily sent home as there's no work ('laid off' or 'put on furlough')
- they've had to continue working and could not take paid holiday

Some employers will already have an agreement to carry over paid holiday. This law does not affect any agreements already in place.

If an employee or worker leaves their job or is dismissed during the 2-year period, any untaken paid holiday must be added to their final pay ('paid in lieu').

Bank holidays

Bank holidays are usually part of the legal minimum 5.6 weeks' paid holiday. Employees and workers must get their usual pay for bank holidays.

Employees and workers may still be required to use a day's paid holiday for bank holidays, including when they're furloughed. If bank holidays are given on top of the 5.6 week's paid holiday, employees and workers should check their contract or talk to their employer about taking this holiday.

If employees and workers usually work on bank holidays but are currently furloughed, they should check with their employer to see if they have to take holiday on that day or if they can take the time off at a later date.

If employees and workers cannot take bank holidays off due to coronavirus, they should use the holiday at a later date in their leave year.

If this is not possible, bank holidays can be included in the 4 weeks' paid holiday that can be carried over. This holiday can be taken at any time over a 2-year period.

Agreeing how extra holiday is carried over

If employers do not already have an agreement in place, they can decide whether they'll allow extra holiday (more than the 4 weeks' paid holiday) to be carried over.

Extra holiday may include:

- the remaining 1.6 weeks of statutory annual leave
- holiday that's more than the legal minimum

Employees and workers should check their employment contract or talk to their employer to find out what they're entitled to.

Reaching an agreement

If the workplace has a recognised trade union, or there are employee representatives who work with the employer on these matters, the employer should involve them in agreeing changes.

If any agreement is made, it's a good idea for it to be in writing.

Employers should get legal advice if they're not sure whether to allow extra holiday to be carried over.

Previously booked holidays

If an employee no longer wants to take time off they'd previously booked, for example because their holiday's been cancelled, their employer may still tell them to take the time off.

If the employee wants to change when they take this time off, they'll need to get agreement from their employer.

Requiring staff to take or cancel holiday

Employers have the right to tell employees and workers when to take holiday.

An employer could, for example, shut for a week and tell everyone to use their holiday entitlement.

If the employer decides 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.

Employers can also cancel pre-booked paid holiday. If they decide to do this, they must give staff at least the same number of days' notice as the original holiday request.

For example, if an employee has booked 5 days holiday, the employer must tell them at least 5 days before the holiday starts that it's cancelled.

This could affect holiday staff have already booked or planned. So employers should:

- explain clearly why they need to do this
- try and resolve anyone's worries about how it will affect their holiday entitlement or plans

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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. Find out about self-isolating:

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

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

6. School closures

As schools in England, Scotland and Wales are now closed except for teaching some children of key workers, this will have an effect 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.

7. 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.](#)

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Employers should consider some simple steps to make sure they continue to provide their staff and customers with a 'duty of care'.

This means they must do all they reasonably can to support their health, safety and wellbeing.

It's good practice for employers to:

- make sure everyone is social distancing if they come into the workplace
- 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](#)

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

- [Scottish Government](#)
- [Welsh Government](#)

8. 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.](#)

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