

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

Current government advice is for everyone to stay at home wherever possible and limit contact with other people.

This includes:

- only going outside for food, exercise, medical reasons or work (where this cannot be done from home)
- staying 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people ('social distancing' or 'physical distancing')
- avoiding busy commuting times on public transport where travel is essential
- washing your hands regularly
- not leaving home if you or anyone in your household has symptoms

What you can and cannot do depends on whether you're in England, Scotland or Wales. For the latest government guidance:

- in England, see [coronavirus advice on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [Scottish Government advice](#)
- in Wales, see [Welsh Government advice](#)

1. If the workplace is open

Employers have a 'duty of care' for staff, customers and anyone else who visits the workplace. This means they must do all they reasonably can to support their health, safety and wellbeing.

To make the workplace safe, employers must:

- encourage staff to work from home, wherever possible
- have completed a 'risk assessment', and taken reasonable steps to prevent harm in the workplace
- follow the [government guidelines on safer working on GOV.UK](#)

To get advice on working safely during coronavirus from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) you can:

- [find coronavirus advice on the HSE website](#)
- [find information on risk assessments on the HSE website](#)
- [use HSE's online enquiry form](#)
- call 0300 790 6787, Monday to Friday 8:30am to 10pm

Which workplaces can be open

The rules on which workplaces can open are different for England, Scotland and Wales. For the latest government guidance:

- in England, see [businesses and premises that must close on GOV.UK](#)

- in Scotland, see [Scottish Government advice on business closures](#)
- in Wales, see [Welsh Government advice on business closures](#)

If the workplace is closed

While the workplace is closed, employers should talk to staff about whether or not they can work from home.

If working from home is not possible, staff might:

- be put on 'furlough' (put on temporary leave)
- use paid holiday
- use other paid or unpaid leave

Keeping in touch

This can be a difficult time for both employers and staff. It's important for employers and staff to keep in touch while the workplace is closed.

Employers should have regular calls with staff to:

- check on their health and wellbeing
- update staff on any actions they've taken
- talk as early as possible about [plans to return to work](#)

Employers should signpost staff to any health and wellbeing support available. For example:

- support your workplace provides, for example through your employee assistance programme (EAP) if there's one available
- support that's available outside your workplace, for example [mental health support from Mind](#)

Find out more about [supporting mental health](#).

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 from the Health and Safety Executive](#)

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.](#)

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, heart disease, hepatitis, Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis (MS)
- have a weakened immune system as the result of medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- are pregnant
- are aged 70 or over
- are seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)

For more about social distancing and vulnerable people:

- in England, see [social distancing guidance on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [NHS inform Scotland](#)
- in Wales, see [Public Health Wales](#)

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

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 or workers 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 or worker receives a letter telling them to start shielding, they should stay at home for at least 12 weeks.

If they cannot work from home during this time, they can ask their employer if they can be put on 'furlough'. Furlough is where an employee or worker agrees in writing with their employer that they will not work temporarily but they will still be employed. [Find out more about furlough.](#)

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 or worker's medical condition must be kept confidential, unless the employee or worker says it can be shared.

For more about shielding and protecting extremely vulnerable people:

- in England, see [shielding guidance on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [NHS inform Scotland](#)
- in Wales, see [Public Health Wales](#)

Discrimination and unfair treatment

If an employee or worker 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 or worker 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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As of 13 March 2020, employees and workers who self-isolate must receive any [Statutory Sick Pay \(SSP\)](#) due to them from the first day they're absent from work if it's because:

- they have coronavirus
- they have coronavirus symptoms, for example a high temperature, a new continuous cough or a loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste
- 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.

For more about households with possible coronavirus:

- in England, see [guidance for households with possible coronavirus on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [NHS Inform Scotland](#)
- in Wales, see [Welsh Government guidance](#)

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

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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Employers might need to put some or all of their employees on temporary leave ('furlough') during the coronavirus pandemic.

Furlough is where an employee or worker agrees with their employer to stop work temporarily but stay employed. Furlough must be agreed in writing.

This can 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.

4. Who can be furloughed

Any of the following can be put on furlough, whether they work full time or part time:

- employees
- workers
- agency workers
- those on zero-hours contracts
- apprentices

Employers can also furlough those who are temporarily unable to work because:

- they're 'shielding' (told to stay at home by the NHS because of an underlying health condition)
- someone in their household is shielding
- they have childcare responsibilities
- they're caring for a vulnerable person in their household

Putting staff on furlough

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

They should:

- get agreement in writing and be clear how much the employee or worker will get paid during their furlough
- keep furloughed workers on the employer's payroll and continue their employment contracts
- make sure furloughs last at least 3 weeks

If someone disagrees with their employer's decision about being selected for furlough or how much they'll get paid, they should talk to their employer and try to come to an agreement.

Furlough agreements

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

- the date furlough starts
- how much the furloughed worker will be paid

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

[Download a furlough agreement template.](#)

Extending furlough

Furlough can be extended by going through the process of putting someone on furlough again. Any agreement to extend should be put in writing.

[Download a furlough extension letter template.](#)

Ending furlough

Employers should regularly review furlough agreements to decide when to bring furloughed staff back to work.

It can help employers to consider:

- which job roles and skills are needed in the workplace
- if all furloughed staff are needed back at the same time
- if any staff might be kept on furlough because they're temporarily unable to work, for example if they're caring for someone or are shielding

To end furlough, employers should give staff notice in writing.

There's no minimum notice period for furlough, but employers should:

- talk to staff about any plans to end furlough as early as possible
- encourage staff to raise any concerns or problems about returning to work

[Download a letter template to end furlough.](#)

Changing an employment contract

If an employer cannot reach an agreement with an employee or worker, they may want to change the written terms in their contract.

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

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

Pay during furlough

Pay during furlough could be less than usual, if agreed between the employer and employee or worker.

The employer may be able to get financial support from HMRC's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Employers can claim for up to 80% or £2,500 of each furloughed employee or worker's usual wages, whichever is lower.

Topping up wages to 100%

The employer should decide whether they'll top up furloughed employees' or workers' wages to 100%, but they do not have to. If the employer decides not to top up the wages, they should explain why.

Minimum wage during furlough

If furloughed staff are paid 80% of their wages through HMRC's scheme, this might mean they get less than the minimum wage. This is allowed as long as they're not working.

But if someone does any training for their job during furlough, they must get the current minimum wage for those hours. For example, if an apprentice continues with their apprenticeship while furloughed.

If furloughed staff take paid family-related leave on or after 25 April 2020

Their usual, full pay must be used to work out if they're eligible for:

- Statutory Maternity Pay
- Statutory Paternity Pay
- Statutory Adoption Pay
- Statutory Shared Parental Pay
- Parental Bereavement Pay

If someone is paid less during furlough, it will not affect their entitlement to statutory pay.

Claiming through HMRC's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

[Claim for wages through HMRC's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme on GOV.UK.](#)

For an employer to claim through the scheme, they must have:

- created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on or before 19 March 2020
- [enrolled for PAYE Online](#)
- a UK bank account

The furloughed employee or worker must have been on their PAYE payroll and included in a 'Real Time Information' (RTI) submission

to HMRC on or before 19 March.

Claims can be backdated to 1 March 2020.

If someone was made redundant or left their job on or after 28 February 2020

An employer can decide to re-employ someone who was made redundant or stopped working for them on or after 28 February 2020, then put them on furlough.

This can be done even if the employer does not employ them again until after 19 March 2020.

The employee must have been:

- on the employer's PAYE payroll on 28 February
- included in a 'Real Time Information' (RTI) submission to HMRC on or before 28 February

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 put on furlough for both jobs, they'll be eligible for financial support for each job.

More financial support available for employers

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 is not able to give further information.

[Find out more about financial support for businesses during coronavirus on GOV.UK.](#)

Financial support if you're self-employed

Financial support will be provided by HMRC's 'Self-employment Income Support Scheme'.

If you're self-employed, you can receive a taxable grant of 80% of your average monthly income, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month.

HMRC will contact you directly if you're eligible for the scheme. The Acas helpline is not able to advise on this scheme.

[Find out more about the Self-employment Income Support Scheme on GOV.UK.](#)

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It's important that employers talk to staff as early as possible about when they can return to the workplace.

Staff should continue to work from home if they can.

5. Planning to return to work

Employers should 'consult' with staff (ask for and consider their views to try and reach an agreement) about returning to work. This includes:

- trade union representatives
- employee representatives
- health and safety representatives

Employers should also check any agreements they have with a trade union or employee representatives to see if they must formally consult.

Employees and workers should be ready to return to work at short notice, but employers should be flexible where possible.

Making the workplace safe

Employers must make the workplace as safe as possible for staff, customers and anyone else who visits. To do this employers must:

- encourage staff to work from home, wherever possible
- do a 'risk assessment' to identify what might cause harm and take reasonable steps to prevent it
- follow the government guidelines on [working safely during coronavirus on GOV.UK](#)

To get advice on working safely during coronavirus from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) you can:

- [find coronavirus advice on the HSE website](#)
- [find information on risk assessments on the HSE website](#)
- [use HSE's online enquiry form](#)
- call 0300 790 6787, Monday to Friday 8:30am to 10pm

Discussing plans with staff

Employers, employees and workers should talk as early as possible about any plans to return to work.

It's a good idea to talk about:

- when staff might return to the workplace

- how staff will travel to and from work
- how health and safety is being reviewed and managed – you should share the latest risk assessment
- any planned adjustments to the workplace, for example additional hand washing facilities, staggering start and finish times to avoid overcrowding or floor markings to help people keep 2 metres apart
- if there might be a phased return of the workforce, for example some staff returning before others
- working from home arrangements

Wherever possible, employers should speak to staff before making a decision or putting plans in writing. This can help staff understand, and feel included in, decisions.

Changes that might affect someone's employment contract

If there are any proposed changes that affect the written terms of someone's contract, the employer must consult with the employee, worker or their representative, for example their trade union representative.

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

If staff are worried

Some people might be anxious about safety and returning to the workplace. Employers should encourage staff to talk to them about any concerns they have, and try to resolve them together.

If someone does not want to return

Some people might feel they do not want to go back to work, or be unable to return yet.

For example, this might be because they're:

- worried about catching coronavirus
- at high risk of getting a severe illness if they catch coronavirus
- caring for children
- living with someone who is 'shielding'

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
- keep someone on furlough if they're temporarily unable to work
- arrange for someone to work different hours temporarily to avoid peak time travel

If someone still does not want to go back to work, 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 someone refuses to attend work without a valid reason, it could result in disciplinary action.

[Find out more about absence from work.](#)

Raising an issue

If an employee or worker has an issue about going back to work, they should raise it with their employer or manager. Employers and managers should take any issues raised by staff seriously.

Read about:

- [how to raise a problem at work](#)
- [dealing with a problem raised by an employee](#)

Related content

[Extending and ending furlough](#)

[/furlough-letter-templates](#)

[/coronavirus-mental-health](#)

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, both physically and mentally

6. Being flexible about holiday during coronavirus

Employers, employees and workers should be as flexible as they can about holiday during the coronavirus pandemic.

It's a good idea to:

- talk about any plans to use or cancel holiday during coronavirus as soon as possible
- discuss why holiday might need to be taken or cancelled
- listen to any concerns, either from staff or the employer
- welcome and suggest ideas for other options
- consider everyone's physical and mental wellbeing
- be aware that it's a difficult time for both employers and staff

If you're a furloughed worker

Employees or workers who are temporarily sent home because there's no work ('furloughed workers'), can request and take their holiday in the usual way, if their employer agrees. This includes bank holidays.

Furloughed workers must get their usual pay in full, for any holiday they take.

Carrying over holiday

During the coronavirus pandemic, 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 into their next 2 holiday leave years. This law applies for any holiday the employee or worker 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 had to continue working and could not take paid holiday

They may also be able to carry over holiday if they've been 'furloughed' and cannot reasonably use it in their holiday year.

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 and has carried over paid holiday because of coronavirus, 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.

Employers can still require employees and workers to take paid holiday on a bank holiday, unless they're off sick. They must give employees or workers notice.

Employees and workers can also ask to take a day's paid holiday on a bank holiday. If the employer agrees, they must get their usual pay in full.

If employees and workers are not sure if bank holidays need to be taken as paid holiday, they should:

- check their contract
- talk to their employer

If bank holidays cannot be taken off due to coronavirus, employees and workers 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 the next 2 holiday leave years.

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

An employee may no longer want to take time off they'd previously booked, for example because their hotel cancelled the booking. Their employer can insist they still take the time off, but it's good practice to get agreement from the employee.

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 and cause upset. 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.](#)

7. 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:

- in England, by using the [NHS 111 coronavirus symptom checker](#) or calling 111
- in Scotland, by using the [NHS inform Scotland symptom checker](#)
- in Wales, by using the [NHS Direct Wales symptom checker](#)
- by 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.

8. 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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For more Acas coronavirus advice, you can:

- [sign up to our coronavirus webinar for employers](#)
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If you're in England, you can find:

- [coronavirus advice on NHS.UK](#)
- [coronavirus information and advice on GOV.UK](#)
- [guidance for employers and businesses on GOV.UK](#)

If you're in Scotland, you can find:

- [coronavirus advice from NHS inform Scotland](#)
- [coronavirus advice from the Scottish Government](#)
- [advice for businesses from the Scottish Government](#)

If you're in Wales, you can find:

- [coronavirus advice from NHS Direct Wales](#)
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