

## Acas publishes new advice on handling coronavirus at work

19 February 2020

Note: our advice has changed since this press release was published. [See our latest coronavirus advice.](#)

The coronavirus outbreak has sparked concerns around what rights someone has when it comes to sick leave or how employers should handle a situation at work if a staff member is affected by the virus.

In response Acas has published new advice today to help employers and their staff understand their rights when it comes to handling the impact of coronavirus at work.

Acas Chief Executive, Susan Clews, said:

“The increase in coronavirus cases is headline news around the world and there are genuine concerns around how to deal with its impact on UK workplaces.

“Employers and workers have started to get in touch with us to ask what their rights are at work when dealing with potential coronavirus cases.

“Our new advice aims to help them handle the impact of coronavirus at work. It includes guidance around sick leave, staff in quarantine and considerations for businesses in case they need to temporarily shut down.”

Acas’s advice includes tips on how to handle sick pay, staff in quarantine and staff who do not want to come into work due to fears over catching the coronavirus. The advice also gives tips for employers if the virus spreads widely in the UK or if a business needs to shut temporarily.

A workplace’s normal sick pay policies apply if someone has coronavirus. But if someone is not sick and their employer tells them not to come into work then they should get their usual pay. For example, if someone has returned from China since the virus outbreak and their employer asks them not to come in as a precaution.

There’s no legal obligation for an employer to pay someone who is not sick but cannot work as they have been told by a medical expert to self-isolate or have had to go into quarantine.

Acas’s advice is that it’s good practice for an employer in this situation to treat it as sick leave and follow their usual sick leave policy or offer the employee the option to take the period as paid annual leave. This can help to reduce the risk that a staff member may feel compelled to come into work and could spread the virus if they have it.

If an employee does not want to go into work due to concerns around catching coronavirus, then employers should listen to their concerns and offer reassurance. Options to consider include:

- offering flexible working arrangements such as homeworking
- allowing them to take some time off as holiday or unpaid leave

If coronavirus spreads more widely in the UK, Acas advice is that employers should:

- make sure staff contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date
- make sure managers are clear on workplace processes such as sickness and absence policies
- implement NHS advice on hygiene such as encouraging everyone to wash their hands regularly and ensuring there are clean places to wash hands with soap and water
- give out hand sanitisers and tissues to staff and encourage their use

Employers should also plan in case they need to close their workplace temporarily. Considerations should include:

- asking staff who have work laptops or mobile phones to take them home so that they can work there
- arranging paperwork tasks that can be done at home for staff who do not work on computers
- making sure staff have a way to communicate with their employer and work colleagues

[See Acas's advice on coronavirus.](#)

## Media enquiries

[Contact the Acas press office.](#)