

# Sickness & Absence



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Employees may need time off for a variety of reasons, from short-term sickness to longer-term health issues. An effective absence management framework should support employees' health needs, while providing clear and consistent guidance to avoid unauthorised absence or inappropriate use of sick pay schemes.

## Sickness

An employee can self-certificate for up to 7 continuous days – this includes non-working days. If they are off work they will need to provide a sick note from a healthcare professional (e.g. GP/Nurse/Occupational Therapist/Physiotherapist).

## Recommendations for employers

- ◀ Ensure that senior leaders are aware of the importance of workplace health and wellbeing and that they embed actions to ensure that it's taken seriously across the organisation.
- ◀ Train line managers and supervisors to manage people well. Line managers are key to employee wellbeing and should ensure people's workloads and deadlines are manageable. They should provide clear objectives and give constructive feedback, as part of a trust-based relationship with people. They should have the confidence to have sensitive conversations with people and offer support and flexibility if a team member needs adjustments to help manage their health and work.
- ◀ Provide early access to occupational health support and other specialist sources of help, such as counselling or physiotherapy.
- ◀ Develop an evidence-based understanding of the causes of absence and unhealthy practices in your organisation, such as 'presenteeism' and 'leaveism'. Unless the underlying issues prompting people's attendance and behaviours are addressed, efforts to improve health and wellbeing will be short-lived.
- ◀ Tailor policies and practices to organisational and employee needs. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to designing an effective employee wellbeing strategy – its content should be based on the organisation's unique needs and characteristics, and of course those of its employees.
- ◀ Build a robust organisational framework to promote good mental wellbeing and foster a culture where people can talk about mental health and seek help where needed.
- ◀ Carry out a risk assessment or audit on work-related stress across the workforce, as part of a preventive approach to identify its main causes.

## Other Absence

Annual Leave	Compassionate
Parental Leave	Emergency Leave for Dependants
Jury Duty	Training
Bereavement	Volunteering



## Recording sickness and absence

It is important to record all absence thoroughly and uniformly across all employees. This could be through specialised software or even just a spreadsheet.

Recording sickness absence helps with the management of employees who are absent due to sickness but also to ensure accurate payment of contractual and SSP (Statutory Sick Pay). The importance of recording it allows you to analyse the data where you can identify trends, such as an increase of absenteeism around school holidays or bank holidays.

## Return to Work Interview

While it is not a legal requirement to have a return to work interview there is a duty of care from the employer to the employee. Responsibility for fulfilling this obligation will often fall on you as a line manager. An awareness of relevant legislation is important to avoid discrimination and ensure fair treatment of absent/returning employees. In particular, you need to be aware of:

- ◀ The Equality Act 2010, which covers a number of different types of discrimination and applies to protected characteristics, such as disability. This includes not treating someone less favourably because of something connected to their disability and the responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of a person with disability.
- ◀ The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which places a duty on employers to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees.
- ◀ The Employment Rights Act 1996, which covers areas related to the employee's contract and includes areas such as unfair dismissal and the termination of employment on ill-health grounds.
- ◀ Fit notes and proof of absence: employees are required to give employers a fit note (this replaced the sick note) if they are off for more than seven days in a row (including non-working days). Fit notes are provided by a GP or, where employers agree, an allied health professional (such as a physiotherapist or occupational therapist)

## Fit Note Guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note>

It is important to check the employee is fit enough to return to work, but also to check whether there was a work reason contributing to their absence.

If there is a contributing factor this is also an opportunity to discuss the reasonable adjustments that are needed to support your employee and allow them to fulfil their duties such as:

- ◀ Office equipment – chairs, standing desks, back support
- ◀ Environmental amendments – designated parking spaces, ramps, lifts
- ◀ Flexible working – hours or compressed weeks

## Other Kind of Absence

In order to maintain good working practices, it is recommended that organisations develop policies on each of the above and share these with employees.