

# 19. How to Manage Sickness Absence

## 1 REPORTING SICKNESS ABSENCE PROCEDURE

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It is advisable to have a procedure in place for when an employee needs to contact you in the event that they are going to be absent from work due to illness.

It is normal for employees to be required to report their absence within one hour of their usual starting time. It is good practice to require employees to talk to their direct manager when reporting their absence (rather than text or email). Your absence reporting procedures should specify this.

## 2 SHORT TERM ABSENCE

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If the absence lasts seven days or less, the employee must provide a self-certification form.

If your employee's absence is to be short term but longer than one day, you may decide to ask them to report their absence for every day of their absence. This is so that you know where your employee is, you know how to record the day and it keeps communication open between you and the employee.

If an employee is absent for seven days or more, they are required to provide you with a Statement of Fitness for Work (fit note) from their GP to cover the dates of sickness absence.

## 3 LONG TERM ABSENCE

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In this definition 'long term' means that the illness has lasted for 12 months, is likely to last for 12 months or is terminal. You should look to understand the employee's illness and seek information about:

- The nature of the illness.
- The likely length of the illness.
- The likelihood of the employee returning to work. It is possible that the nature of the illness means that the employee will never be able to return to work or never be able to return to the job which they previously did.
- The support that the employee will need if they do return to work.

## 4 MEDICAL RECORDS

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It is unlawful to seek medical records or an opinion from the employee's GP, without the written permission of your employee.

Your employee may refuse to give such permission as they may be uncomfortable with you seeing their medical records. It might be appropriate to ask your employee to attend a medical examination with an independent medical expert, particularly if it is not clear whether the employee is well enough to continue in a current role.

If an independent medical examination is required, it is good practice to explain to the employee the purpose of the medical examination and to clearly explain who will have access to the report. The report should outline any support and reasonable adjustments that you could make to help the employee return to work and improve their health and wellbeing in the long term.

## 5 KEEPING IN TOUCH DURING A PERIOD OF ABSENCE

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It is good practice to keep in touch with the employee during a period of absence in order to:

- Remind the employee that you care about their health and want them to return to work.
- Keep your employee aware of any changes or events that are taking place so that their return to work is as smooth as possible.
- Maintain a discussion about the possible date of return to work.
- Identify as early as possible if there will be a need to consider any adjustments to work to allow your employee to return.

It is important that the employee is not contacted with work-related queries, unless there are exceptional circumstances and the employee is well enough to address the query.

## 6 RETURN TO WORK

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Where an employee has been judged fit to work but with an alteration to duties, a phased return to work, altered hours or workplace alterations, the employee should discuss these adjustments with the employer.

It is good practice to carry out a return to work interview with all employees after sickness, even if the absence has been for only one day. This is so that:

- You can ensure that the employee is well enough to be at work.
- The employee has an opportunity to suggest any alterations that might be needed so that they can continue working.
- You can raise any concerns about the absence.

You should keep confidential records so that any absence trends can be identified and you can provide appropriate support.

## 7 NEXT STEPS

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- Decide how you would like employees to communicate with you in the event that they are reporting their absence from work due to sickness.
- Develop a policy on absence management and ensure your employees are aware of this.
- Ensure that you carry out a return to work interview after each period of employee absence.

## 8 FACTSHEETS TO HELP

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- Promoting an Equal Opportunities Workplace and Avoiding Discrimination
- Health and Safety in the Workplace
- How to Manage Holidays
- How to Manage Other Types of Absence

## 9 FOR MORE ADVICE AND INFORMATION

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**ACAS** - (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

**Achieve in Bath & North East Somerset** - free recruitment support, advice and help. Matching job seekers, employers and course providers to help employers recruit, train and retain employees. [www.achieveinbathnes.co.uk](http://www.achieveinbathnes.co.uk)

**Future Bright** - free help & support for businesses and employees to realise their full potential. Provide access to training and development, workshops and networking. HR support to promote career progression and best practice to attract and retain staff. [www.futurebright.org.uk](http://www.futurebright.org.uk)

**Bibliography** - this fact sheet was produced by Rathbone HR Solutions in association with Cool Ventures Ltd in December 2018 with content sourced from; HR Inform ([www.hr-inform.co.uk](http://www.hr-inform.co.uk)), ACAS ([www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)), CIPD ([www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)), the pensions regulator ([www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/employers](http://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/employers)), HMRC ([www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs)), the Information Commissioner's Officer website ([www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk))



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