

Managing coronavirus in the workplace

Although reported cases of coronavirus in the UK remain very low, employers should consider the risk of exposure and take measures to protect the health and safety of their staff. Here, we take a look at practical considerations for all employers.

- Assess how your work practices may put your employees at risk. For example, if you would require employees to travel to affected areas, consider postponing the trip or conducting meetings by Skype or video conference where possible.
- Employers should speak with those who are returning from affected areas due to either business travel or holiday before their return to ascertain their current health condition. If symptoms (including cough, fever, breathing problems) are reported, employees should be advised to visit their GP and sickness absence should be dealt with as normal.
- There is currently no obligation to require non-symptomatic employees returning from affected areas to stay away from work, however, if employers are concerned (due to known/potential contact with infected individuals) then it is advisable to play safe and place the employee on a brief period of paid suspension.
- All employees should be urged to maintain good hygiene including regularly washing hands and coughing/sneezing into tissues and immediately throwing them away.

EU Settlement Scheme continues to operate

The Scheme via which EU nationals currently in the UK may apply to remain after the Brexit transition period has ended has received over 2,756,000 applications. Current estimates indicate that approximately 0.5 million EU nationals in the UK still need to apply.

Did you know?

EU nationals who wish to stay in the UK after 31st December 2020 must apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. The transition period means that EU nationals may still arrive in the UK until the end of 2020 and use the Scheme to obtain clearance to stay. Applications must be made by 30th June 2021.

Taking time off for medical appointments "stressful"

A survey by employee benefits provider Unum revealed that 6 out of 10 employees who took time off work to go to a medical appointment found it stressful. A quarter of those polled had to cancel an appointment because of work demands.

Did you know?

Employees do not have a right to take time off work for medical appointments except where pregnancy related. Employers can put some rules in place e.g. appointments should be at the start or end of a working day. However, it would be prudent to be flexible e.g. if a delayed appointment would mean sickness absence or the worsening of a condition.

Key NMW in the care sector case due next week

The care sector is eagerly awaiting the case of *Mencap v Tomlinson-Blake*, to be heard in the Supreme Court on 12-13 February 2020. The Court will decide whether workers who are asleep during a sleep-in shift are 'working' or not. If they are working, they will be entitled to the national minimum wage (NMW) for each hour spent asleep.

Did you know?

The result of this case could have far reaching effects because counting time spent asleep as time which attracts NMW will significantly increase wage costs. Other industries such as hospitality and security may also be affected.

It isn't often that employers have to manage scenarios such as the international outbreak of a virus. Spanning both health & safety and employment laws, it is nonetheless vital that good advice is taken to ensure the duty of care is met. To keep up to date with this quickly developing issue, call our 24 hour advice service.

Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this publication.