



Coronavirus Guide for Business Owners

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Introduction



Over the last couple of weeks, Croner's advice and sales team have received a lot of calls about the coronavirus (now known as COVID-19) and how the ongoing outbreak of the potentially fatal infectious disease may impact their business.

The nature of the virus is not yet fully known, and as such information about the virus, how contagious it is, and how it is transmitted, may be lacking. Until more is known official sources such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), will only release information about the virus as it comes to light. For the latest on the UK response, visit [the government website](#).

So far, what is known about the virus is that:

- It was not detected prior to the current outbreak
- Symptoms include fever, coughing, a sore throat, headaches, fatigue, and shortness of breath
- The nature of the virus is still being studied and at the time of writing there is no known cure



Croner strongly urges all clients and business owners around the UK to only consider the advice of health experts when considering and implementing any coronavirus-related workplace health & safety policies.

In this guide we will share best practice hygiene tips and answer frequently asked questions about the coronavirus. Information about sick leave and self-isolating employees will also be included in this information pack.

The information in this guide is of a general nature only and is not a substitute for advice from a qualified medical professional.

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Workplace Hygiene

Employers have an obligation to ensure a safe workplace. It is best practice to educate staff on how to reduce the likelihood of disease, as a preventative measure, irrespective of the Coronavirus threat.

As mentioned in the introduction, not much is known about the Coronavirus – and that lack of knowledge impacts the ability to advise business owners on how to best prevent the spread of the disease.

Given that, best practice hygiene tips are all that can be offered at the time of writing.

These tips include:

- Washing your hands thoroughly
 - Use soap and water
 - Rub the soap over all parts of your hands for at least 20 seconds
 - Rinse
 - Dry your hands with a paper towel

- Coughing and sneezing thoughtfully
 - Cover your mouth with a tissue, or
 - Cough into your upper sleeve or elbow
 - Do not cough into your hands

- Avoiding contact with wild or farm animals

Official Information Is Important

Please follow the official page for up-to-date information. Avoid misinformation – doing so may save lives.

The government website has several resources, in both English and Chinese. They can be found on the [official page](#).

Free Download



Included in this information pack is an easy-to-understand infographic that provides five top tips on improving hygiene in the workplace.

Download

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Employer Obligations



Q: Should I be sending employees home?

A: The government has now advised that all employees should be working from home "where they possibly can."

This means if you haven't already, you need to start making preparations for home-working for your employees. That is unless their presence at work is vital to performing their role.

If an employee becomes unwell in the workplace with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, send them home and advise them to stay at home.

Also, any vulnerable employees should be sent home. This includes people aged 70 or older, those with a serious underlying health condition, or anyone who is pregnant.

Further guidance was provided on self-isolation too. Now, if anyone in an employee's household displays symptoms, the employee should stay at home for 14 days. So, if an employee is displaying symptoms, if someone they share a home with is displaying symptoms, or if they're able to work from home, they shouldn't be at work.

Updates are posted regularly on the government website, so [keep up to date with them here](#).

Employees need to take time off to care for dependants because their school/nursery has closed. What do I do?

A: This undoubtedly will put a lot of pressure on you, particularly if a large percentage of your workforce are parents.

The short term solution is to utilise 'time off for dependents'. This gives parents a short period off work to look after their children or arrange care measures. This usually lasts no more than a few days.

However, given the unprecedented nature of the virus, some parents won't be able to arrange care for their children. For example, an individual may usually leave a child with their grandparents while they're out of school, but not want to do so now, as this might result in passing the virus on to their vulnerable family members.

As such, you might need a longer-term solution. One way of managing this is by introducing flexible working. Some parents might be able to work from home, and be willing to do so. Another solution is allowing them to take up to 18 weeks' unpaid parental leave. This will obviously be a less popular solution, so try and negotiate favourable terms with your employee.

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Whatever your approach, remain in contact with the employee and pass on any updates as soon as possible.

Remember, there are a number of key workers whose children will be able to remain in school regardless of the closures. The government has released a full list that can be found [here](#).

Q: What do I do if someone refuses to come into work?

A: Many people are rightfully concerned about their health. If there's a heightened risk of catching the virus in your workplace, some employees may refuse to come in. If they do this you should listen to their concerns and offer reassurance.

Consider offering a temporary flexible working arrangement, including homeworking if possible. Or, allow them to take some time off as holiday or unpaid leave.

And, of course, if there's a legitimate reason for not coming into the office (as outlined above) employees should be staying at home.

Forcing an employee to come into work against their will, in these unprecedented circumstances, is likely to get messy fast, so try to be as considerate and flexible as possible.

Q: Do I have to pay employees who are self-isolating?

A: The other issue that comes with self-isolating is pay. Everyone who has been advised to self-isolate will be entitled to statutory sick pay (SSP). This is provided they meet other qualifying conditions, such as a minimum level of earnings. And, this is expected to be the case for the next eight months.

For companies with fewer than 250 staff, the Government has pledged to refund SSP for the first two weeks of absence.

Do I have to pay employees who have Coronavirus?

A: If an employee is legitimately sick with the virus, then they qualify for at least SSP. If their contract states that they are provided more, then they will receive that.

SSP is paid at £94.25 per week for up to 28 weeks, and is paid from the fourth day of sickness absence. The individual may not have to provide a doctor's note, as staff can self-certify with symptoms of flu without a doctor.

REMEMBER: This will increase to £95.85 in April 2020.

The government have stated that SSP will be provided from day one, not day four. However, the current implementation date for this is yet to be announced.

Should I pay someone who is self-isolating to take care of a dependant with Coronavirus symptoms?

A: If they are under government guidance to self-isolate then they should receive SSP.

What should I do to minimise impact?

A: Acas has also provided guidance for what you should do if the virus spreads more widely across the UK. You should:

- › **Ensure staff details are up to date**
- › **Ensure emergency contact details are up to date**
- › **Refresh managers on policies & procedures, in particular those relating to sickness absence**
- › **Implement NHS advice on hygiene in your workplace, including hand-washing guidance and the provision of soap and water**
- › **Provide hand sanitisers and tissues to staff and encourage usage of them.**

It's also worth considering whether you might need to close your workplace. This includes considering whether homeworking is possible, and maintaining communication with staff.

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Need more help?



If you would like more advice on how to deal with specific issues related to the Coronavirus, please feel free to contact Croner.

We can help you better understand issues like:

- > Sickness absence

- > Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

- > Homeworking

- > Harassment, Bullying & Discrimination against those affected

- > Shortage of Work / Redundancy

We can also supply employers with supporting documentation to assist with the implementation of their policies.

The above advice is general in nature. For specific advice on HR, employment law, or health & safety matters. speak to us directly on 0800 015 4939 or contact us online.

Any specific medical advice regarding Coronavirus should be obtained from a medical practitioner, the NHS, or the World Health Organisation. Croner cannot provide medical advice.

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Let's talk

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