



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: The Government have announced I need to shut down, what do I do now?

A: Just because your business has been deemed non-essential doesn't mean it has to stop working. If your employees can feasibly work from home, operations can continue.

If you do let your employees continue to work from home, you should ensure you pay them as normal.

On the other hand, if it's not possible for employees to work from home, staff can be laid off on no pay if you have a contractual clause to that effect. Or, you can take advantage of the Job Retention Scheme and furlough them. Find more details on this new scheme in the following Q&A.

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

Q: What financial support is the Government offering?

A: The latest support the Government is offering is called the 'Job Retention Scheme'. This involves placing an employee on a 'furlough'. This isn't a term commonly used in UK employment law, but is used in the USA.

The term means temporarily changing their status to 'furloughed worker', where they don't work but are retained on your books to be brought back when you need them.

The government is offering grants to cover 80% of furloughed employees' wages, to a maximum of £2,500 per employee per month.

Any employer can access this scheme, regardless of size or business type.

You need to get agreement from your employees before designating them as furloughed workers and submit that information to HMRC with each employee's earnings. The first grants should be paid by the end of April 2020.

Any employee can be furloughed, including those on zero-hour and temp contracts, so long as they're on PAYE. So ultimately, it's your choice who utilises the scheme and who doesn't. You can't make employees work while they're furloughed, even if they're on short time working.

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Employer Obligations

Q: Employees need to care for dependants. Can I expect them to work from home?

A: Potentially, yes.

Assess the situation carefully. Just because an employee is also caring for children doesn't necessarily mean they're unable to do their work. It might be worth implementing a trial period where you can observe the arrangement and evaluate if it's working.

Time off for dependants only covers a short amount of time and if the employee is unable to work from home, and unable to make other arrangements for the care of their child, you should try to agree that they take annual leave, or take a period of unpaid leave.

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

Q: What do I do if an essential worker refuses to come into work?

A: Employees 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.

If they're a key worker, it's likely homeworking isn't possible. But, if it is, consider arrangements, or other flexible working options. For example, many schools are arranging a rota system amongst their staff.

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. If the employee refuses to engage with you, you could consider disciplinary procedures, but be cautious in doing so.

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

A: 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.

Q: 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.

Q: 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.

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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

- › The Job Retention Scheme

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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