**Sickness Absence Policy Addendum – June 2020**

*This addendum should be read in conjunction with the relevant policy, and it supports and works alongside the policy. All employees should make themselves aware of both the policy and the addendum. If there are any questions, employees must refer to their manager.*

*The usual company policy rules will apply.*

**Hygiene measures**  
The World Health Organisation’s standard infection control measures are:

* frequently cleaning hands by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water for 20 seconds – upon arrival at work, after using the toilet, after eating and throughout the day
* when coughing and sneezing, cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately, and wash your hands with soap and water
* avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough
* if you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, stay at home, seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your healthcare provider
* self-isolate in line with government guidelines
* get tested.

**Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) – Coronavirus**   
In March, new laws surrounding the payment of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) were introduced.

SSP should now be paid from day one, not day four, of absences in the following situations:

* to someone who has the virus
* to someone who is self-isolating for seven days because they have even mild symptoms of the virus
* to someone who is self-isolating for 14 days because, whilst they do not have symptoms, they are living with someone who has even mild symptoms of the virus.
* those who have been advised by their GP or NHS to ‘shield’ for a 12-week period because they are classed at high risk of severe illness due to their medical status.

If someone is self-isolating because they are living with someone who has symptoms, then start to show symptoms themselves, the 14-day isolation no longer applies, and they should instead self-isolate for seven days. This could prolong, or shorten, the overall period of the leave.

**Scheme eligibility**   
Businesses eligible to use the scheme are those that:

* have a PAYE payroll scheme, which was created and started on or before 28 February 2020
* had fewer than 250 employees on 28 February 2020
* are claiming for an employee who is eligible for SSP due to coronavirus.

**Recoverable amount**  
The maximum to be claimed is two weeks’ SSP, from the first qualifying day, per employee. Employers can claim for periods of sickness starting on or after:

* 13 March 2020 if the employee had coronavirus or the symptoms or is self-isolating because someone they live with has symptoms
* 16 April 2020 if the employee was shielding because of coronavirus.

If employers pay contractual sick pay in excess of the SSP rate, they will only be able to recover up to the weekly rate paid. The weekly rate was £94.25 before 6 April 2020 and is now £95.85.

**Record keeping**  
Employers must keep the following records for three years after the date that the rebate is received:

* the dates the employee was off sick
* which of those dates were qualifying days
* the reason for the absence, whether this be that they had symptoms, someone they lived with had symptoms or they were shielding in line with NHS or GP advice
* the employee’s National Insurance number.

**NHS test and trace service**   
On 28 May 2020, the NHS test and trace service was launched in England. The service will:

* provide testing for anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus to find out if they have the virus
* get in touch with anyone who has had a positive test result to help them share information about any close recent contacts they have had
* alert those contacts, where necessary, and notify them that they need to self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus.

The government states that, by following instructions to self-isolate, people who have had close recent contact with someone with coronavirus will be protecting their family, friends, colleagues and other people around them, and will play a direct role in stopping the spread of the virus.

When someone first develops symptoms and orders a test, they will be encouraged to alert the people that they have had close contact with in the 48 hours before symptoms started. If any of those close contacts are colleagues, the person who has developed symptoms may wish to (but is not obliged to) ask their employer to alert those colleagues. At that stage, those close contacts are not advised to self-isolate, but they:

* must avoid individuals who are at high risk of contracting coronavirus, for example, because they have pre-existing medical conditions, such as respiratory issues
* must take extra care in practising social distancing and good hygiene and in watching out for symptoms.

**‘Close contact’ means:**

* having face-to-face contact with someone (less than one metre away)
* spending more than 15 minutes within two metres of someone
* travelling in a car or other small vehicle with someone (even on a short journey) or close to them on a plane.

Those who test positive will be asked, via the service, whether they have had any such close contact in the 48 hours before they developed symptoms and the time since they developed symptoms.

The service will then contact anyone they report as having had close contact with and tell them to *begin self-isolation for 14 days* from their last contact with the person who has tested positive even if they do not feel unwell.

The practical effect of this service is that many more individuals are likely to self-isolate. In addition, large parts of a workforce, or an entire workforce, may receive an alert telling them they should self-isolate because one member of the workforce has tested positive for coronavirus.

**Recommendations**  
Employers can help to combat this by ensuring that employees work from home where possible or implementing strict social distancing and hygiene measures in the workplace.

These can be found on the government website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Although self-isolation is voluntary at this stage, the government has stated it will be made mandatory if necessary.

The government has put together guidance for employers, which stresses that their role in the system is vital by:

* making their workplaces as safe as possible,
* encouraging workers to heed any notifications to self-isolate and supporting them when in isolation.

**Follow the strict hygiene and cleaning measures in the workplace:**

* Encourage people to follow the [guidance on hand washing and hygiene](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/):

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/>

* Provide hand sanitiser around the workplace, in addition to washrooms.
* Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly.
* Enhancing cleaning for busy areas.
* Set clear usage and cleaning guidance for toilets.
* Provide hand-drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers.

**Where possible, you should maintain 2m between people by:**

* putting up signs to remind workers and visitors of social distancing guidance
* avoiding sharing workstations
* using floor tape or paint to mark areas to help people keep to a 2m distance
* arranging one-way traffic through the workplace if possible
* switching to seeing visitors by appointment only if possible.

**Where people cannot be 2m apart, manage transmission risk by:**

* considering whether an activity needs to continue for the business to operate
* keeping the activity time involved as short as possible
* using screens or barriers to separate people from each other
* using back-to-back or side-to-side working whenever possible
* staggering arrival and departure times
* reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using ‘fixed teams or partnering’.

It acknowledges that, although this may seem disruptive for businesses, it is less disruptive than an outbreak of coronavirus in the workplace will be, and far less disruptive than periods in lockdown.

Employers should support employees who need to self-isolate and must not ask them to attend the workplace.

If an employee needs to self-isolate, employers should consider whether they are able to work from home. This might include finding alternative work that can be completed at home during the period of self-isolation.

**Pay**  
Employees who cannot work from home will be entitled to receive SSP in line with the guidance on self-isolation given above due to further legislative amendments. Alternatively, the employer may agree that a period of annual leave is to be taken so that full pay is maintained.

Employers may wish to strongly encourage employees who receive a notification to make this known, and to self-isolate, in order to protect the rest of the workforce.

**Test and trace**  
The NHS test and trace service will provide a notification that can be used as evidence that someone has been told to self-isolate. This notification will be needed to make a claim to the SSP Rebate Scheme.

**Self-isolation**  
New government guidance, which supersedes previous guidance on self-isolation and returning travellers – and is available on the government website – outlines the following:

* Anyone with a high temperature/fever and/or a continuous cough and/or a loss of or change in their usual taste and smell should self-isolate at home for a period of seven days after the onset of their symptoms.
* This applies even to individuals who have been in contact with anyone known to have contracted the coronavirus or have been to an affected area.

Anyone who lives in the household of an individual showing these symptoms should self-isolate for a period of 14 days. If they start to show symptoms during this time, they should self-isolate for seven days at a minimum even if this takes them beyond the initial 14-day period.

All individuals who are advised to self-isolate in these situations are entitled to be paid statutory sick pay for their period of time away.

This period applies up until the end of seven days following the initial onset of their symptoms.

Also, during this time, the employee may feel well enough to work – not all those who self-isolate are going to have the coronavirus. If this is the case, and if possible, employers may consider them working from home until the individual feels unable to do so.

Please refer to our homeworking policy for more information.

**Sickness absence**The government is currently advising people in certain situations to self-isolate. In the event that this applies to you, you *must not* attend work during the isolation period. You must contact your manager by phone, as soon as possible, to let them know that you have been required to self-isolate and you must keep them regularly updated on any developments. Where feasible, we may consider whether you can work from home during this period, or whether we can agree a period of paid annual leave. Where no other agreement is made [Insert details on pay during self-isolation; e.g. you will receive statutory sick pay subject to qualifying criteria/ OR you will receive contractual sick pay subject to qualifying criteria]

If you were identified by the NHS as part of the shielding group, you may have already been placed on furlough leave.

**Contracting the virus**If you or your family develop symptoms at any time, you should follow the advice given to you by the government, keeping us regularly updated as to your condition. You *must not attend* work during the isolation period. You must contact your manager as soon as possible by phone, to let them know that you have been required to self-isolate and you must keep them updated on any developments. If it is confirmed that you have contracted coronavirus, your time off work will be treated in the same way as any other sickness absence. You must comply with our rules on sickness notification outlined in the sickness absence policy.

**Sending employees home**If we are concerned that you may have been exposed to the virus even though you are not displaying symptoms, we may take the decision to send you home and require you not to attend work. Where feasible, we may consider whether you can work from home during this period, or whether we can agree a period of paid annual leave or you will receive Statutory Sick pay subject to qualifying criteria.

**Working from home**In compliance with government guidance, we will consider permitting you to work from home for a temporary period if such an option is feasible.

**School closures**If you must remain at home whilst you make alternative arrangements for your child’s care, this time will be treated in accordance with rules on time off for dependants, or you may wish to apply for annual leave, or apply for reduced working hours, or unpaid leave, or discuss whether you can work from home on a full- or part-time basis. Please discuss this with your manager to determine the most appropriate option.

*All employees should make themselves aware of both the policy and the addendum, and if they have any questions please refer to their manager.*