

Coronavirus
Frequently Asked Questions for School Based Employees
Number 2

Question:

How should staff identified within the clinically vulnerable group should be managed?

Answer:

Schools are staffed by a wide range of people and some may be more vulnerable, for example, because they have an underlying health condition. The government has advised those who are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) to be particularly careful in following social distancing measures. Staff will generally fall into one of the following categories

1. Any staff member with symptoms of coronavirus should cease working immediately and self-isolate.
2. Any staff member who resides with a family member with symptoms of coronavirus should cease working immediately and self-isolate for 14 days.
3. Staff not in one of the more vulnerable health groups can continue to work as normal.
4. For pregnant staff or staff with an underlying health condition, settings should make a risk assessment based on their personal circumstances and the roles they play within the setting. Some may be able to work normally. If someone in the setting is showing symptoms of coronavirus, staff with an underlying health condition should be redeployed to work in roles which mean that they are not in contact with potential coronavirus cases. These staff should work from home where possible, and schools should endeavour to support this.
5. If a member of staff lives with someone in a vulnerable health group, including those who are pregnant, particular attention should be taken to social distancing guidelines. Further guidance on this will be provided shortly.
6. Staff with a serious (very high risk) underlying health condition should be advised not to attend. These people will shortly receive a letter from NHS England advising them that their health makes them particularly at risk and that they should be 'shielded' from infection. Staff in this position must not attend work.

All staff should ensure that they follow social distancing guidance, wash their hands frequently, sneeze or cough into a tissue and self-isolate if they or a member of their household becomes ill.

Question:

Who are the critical workers?

Answer:

There is not a precise list of role definitions, rather an outline of what types of work could lead to someone being deemed a critical worker. Schools will be considering with staff with particular skills and qualifications how they can be best used; for example any staff with valid DBS clearance may be sensibly refocused during this period irrespective of their formal role. You should discuss with employees whether you feel they are covered by the definition, these staff should be asked to make arrangements for their children's school to confirm a place.

Question:

Will teachers and other employees continue to be paid?

Answer:

Yes. Employees will continue to receive their normal pay during this period, however, unless they are unfit, they can be asked to undertake some work, which may be from home.

Question:

What adjustments can be made for employees who are not able to attend work location but are well?

Answer:

Options for working from home should be explored. Depending on the individual's circumstances and the kind of work that can be undertaken schools will want to support their employees in being flexible in the way that they work.

Headteachers/ employees will hopefully be able to come to some arrangement which will allow someone to work different hours. E.g. working in the evening may allow employees to work at times when there are others who are able to care for their children.

It may also be possible to allocate alternative duties to some home bound employees which would free up other staff to do work which requires a physical presence.

HSE has also issued [guidance on risk assessments](#) relating to working from home due to Covid-19.

Question:

How should schools be staffed over the Easter Break?

Answer:

The Government is asking schools, wherever possible, to maintain provision for children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response over the Easter holidays. If schools are staying open over the Easter break schools should consider carefully the staffing required. The staffing required will need to be sufficient to safely manage the pupils who are in attendance. It will vary from school to school depending on their circumstances. Schools may want to undertake a risk assessment to help them determine what is appropriate. Consideration should be given to ensuring that there is someone on site who is responsible for safeguarding, a first aider, and a SLT member available.

Question:

Can schools flex on legal requirements in order to deliver this service?

Answer:

The government are preparing legislation that will temporarily disapply or modify some requirements on schools to enable them to focus on this core new task. Schools should focus on safeguarding duties as a priority. Where schools have concerns about the impact of staff absence – such as their Designated Safeguarding Lead or first aiders – they should discuss this immediately with the local authority.

Question:

If staff work over the Easter break what happens to their holiday?

Answer:

Schools should consider how staffing can be arranged to ensure that everyone has an opportunity for a break. This may mean splitting those staff available over the days or weeks that need to be covered. When determining the staffing availability schools should take into account the government advice, above, about who is able to attend work.

Question:

What if I do not have enough staff available to open the school?

Answer:

Where possible schools should manage the staffing situation at school level. Where it is not possible to provide sufficient staff it may be necessary to consider seeking staff from other schools or directing pupils to alternative educational provision.

Question:

Can/should staff be redeployed to another role or another school/ LA Service?

Answer:

In nearly all cases schools will continue to run to a limited extent, and some workers may be able to operate from home. However, for instance, if a school is shut down on a temporary basis in response to managing the virus employees will not be required to provide the service they are normally employed to do. Consideration should be given to whether or not it would be appropriate to redeploy them to other schools or Local Authority essential services where there may be a need for additional staff, particularly if there is an increase in staff absence. Such redeployment will normally require some form of training including any necessary health and safety information and Personal Protective Equipment if required for the temporary role. If redeployment is envisaged it would be prudent to put as much of this in place as soon as possible and before the need to redeploy arises.

Schools are expected to be flexible to ensure that services can be maintained, and early discussions with individuals about how best to redeploy individuals will help maintain that flexibility. Where necessary, employees who are suitably trained or skilled to carry out tasks can be asked temporarily to provide cover if the number of employees available for work who normally provide the service becomes too low. In these exceptional circumstances the underlying principle is that if someone has an acceptable level of training or skills and knowledge to carry out the basic task, it should in many cases be reasonable to expect them to do it, although it will very much depend on the individual's circumstances, such as whether they have any underlying condition which might require adjustments in order to perform the new role. Where staff are asked to work flexibly to cover other jobs, volunteers should be sought in the first instance. (Volunteers should not be sought from employees who live with and / or have caring responsibilities for people in the vulnerable groups)

The aim is to get the most out of the employees who are fit to work, which will mean schools obtaining flexibility from employees.

The best way of obtaining flexibility is to get employees' agreement to changes. In all cases though, no employee should be pressurised to undertake other duties that they are unfamiliar with and that they do not have the basic skills or knowledge to complete the tasks required. Unless there are urgent, mitigating reasons, schools should not require staff who do not have experience of supervising large groups of children as part of their usual role, to be doing so now without adequate support being provided

If a member of staff has agreed to be redeployed to another school to support their provision over Easter, care should be taken to ensure that they are able to take some time off at another time and that they are not at any financial detriment.

If a school is shut down on a temporary basis in response to managing the virus and it is not be possible to deploy staff to other duties or redeploy them, then employees may be required to stay at home, for which they would continue to receive contractual pay. They should remain available for work and may be called to work at short notice.

At the current time, it is not anticipated that schools will need to close totally for long periods of time, requiring staff to be made redundant. As such we do not expect schools to require access to the government's employee retention scheme.

Question:

Contractually, can teachers and other term-time staff work over the Easter break?

Answer:

The School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) states that teachers should be available for work 190 days when the children are in attendance. In these exceptional circumstances, there is sufficient scope to ask teachers to attend over the Easter break and take time off at another time. Likewise term-time employees employed under NJC "Green Book" conditions of service are employed to work for 38 weeks per year when the children are in school. In these extraordinary times schools are able to agree with staff when these weeks will be worked. It is recommended that volunteers should be sought in the first instance and agreement reached with staff when they might be able to take this time back.

Wherever possible staff should be asked to work and be given time back rather than being asked to undertake additional working time for additional pay.

Question:

How will any additional costs be covered?

Answer:

The Government has recognised that schools may face additional costs as a result of the coronavirus and have agreed to put in place a new process that allows them to reimburse schools for exceptional costs that they face as a result. Details of the scheme will be published shortly. It is not clear at this time what this may cover.

Question:

What about employees on sick leave for something other than coronavirus?

Answer:

Follow normal procedures. Employees who are absent due to sickness (not related to Coronavirus) are able to self-certify for the first seven days and should then provide the necessary certification from their GP.

Until further guidance has been issued from Public Health England we would advise that absent employees contact their local surgeries to ascertain if medical certificates can be issued over the telephone or via the internet. If this is not possible then the line manager/ headteacher should take a sympathetic and pragmatic approach. Schools are advised to maintain a local record.

Question:

What do I need to pay agency/supply /relief staff?

Answer:

Supply/agency/ relief staff are engaged to work in the school when there is work available for them to do. If there is no work for them to do they will not be required and they will not be paid. It is recognised that this may not be straightforward and therefore we advise that schools contact the schools HR advisory team for advice and guidance

If the relief worker was expected to be working until say Easter without any further dialogue then you should pay them as per the agreement until that point. If however the relief worker would not be coming in without a specific request then this probably isn't custom and practice and therefore they do not need to be paid. You are saying that there isn't a need to use them currently hence there is no need to pay them, but it is likely that they will be used again in the future when the need arises.

If you have agreed with a relief worker, such as an exam invigilator when they should attend you will be obliged to honour this agreement and pay them. If however you have asked about their availability and not confirmed when they would be required you would not have the same obligation. If you use the same people for roughly the same amount every year and you are happy to pay them, to ensure that you retain them for the future, it is in your gift to do so.

Question:

What will happen in relation to an employee during a self-isolation period?

Answer:

If an employee is fit and able to they should be asked to work from home during the self-isolation period, as far as it is possible to do so. Schools are advised to maintain a local record of those staff who are self-isolating together with the reason and the duration.

Question:

What proof is needed in relation to employees who need to self-isolate?

Answer:

Employees in self-isolation need to follow their workplace's usual sickness reporting process. Those self-isolating due to coronavirus for more than 7 days can get an online self-isolation note from the:

NHS website

NHS mobile phone app

Question:

How can I support employees in particular those who may be anxious about the situation?

Answer:

Like all employers, schools are under a legal duty to maintain health and safety; this continues to be the case during an emergency situation. Employees are likely to be concerned about the risk of contracting the virus. Schools must take all reasonable steps to protect employees' health and safety, provide clear and accessible communications about the likely risks and take a supportive view of those who have caring responsibilities. Headteachers should provide opportunities for employees to discuss their concerns with their line manager and may want to direct them to the education support partnership website who have trained counsellors who will listen without judgement and will help employees think through the problems they are facing to find a way forwards and feel better.

This service is UK-wide: 08000 562 561. The helpline is free and available to all teachers, lecturers and staff in education (primary, secondary, further or higher education) in England, Wales and Scotland. They are there for employees 24/7, 365 days a year.



Need to talk?

**Emotional support for education staff
in uncertain times**

Helpline:
08000 562561
educationsupport.org.uk/helpline

 Education
Support