



# Coronavirus

The coronavirus is currently presenting a number of challenges and concerns, not least of all for businesses and employers wondering how incidents will impact the workplace.

Croner, our trusted HR and employment law partner, address the most common questions for members below.

For instant guidance on this matter, or wider HR queries, call your dedicated member support helpline on **0844 561 8133**.

## Q: Should I be sending my employees home?

**A:** It depends on the circumstances. There's no need to fly into a blind panic and send everyone home just yet. But, if a member of staff has returned from one of the affected areas, you can reasonably ask them to stay at home. Particularly if they're displaying symptoms.

There are certain areas you need to be concerned about:

### Hubei province in China

Any employee returning from this region should automatically self-isolate, even if they're not showing symptoms. So, if you know an employee has been here and they turn up to work—send them home.

### Iran, lockdown areas in northern Italy, or special care zones in South Korea

Employees should automatically self-isolate if they've returned from these areas after 19th Feb. Same advice as above.

### Other parts of mainland China or South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, or Thailand

If an employee has been in one of these regions and returned since 19th February, they should be fine to come into work. Provided they aren't showing symptoms. If they do start to show them, even if they're mild, you should send them home.

### Other parts of northern Italy (anywhere north of Pisa, Florence and Rimini, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, or Vietnam

Same advice as above. They're fine to come into work so long as they're not displaying symptoms, but if they do, send them home.

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

**A:** Some people are legitimately 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 you should listen to their concerns and offer reassurance.

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

Forcing an employee to come into work against their will 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. UK Health Secretary, Matt Hancock has advised that employees who are told to self-isolate are entitled to sick leave but not necessarily sick pay. Acas has re-affirmed this, pointing out that there's no legal obligation to pay.

However, Acas have also outlined that it's good practice to pay employees if they're self-isolating.

So what should you do? Generally, we'd advise paying employees if they're self-isolating.

If you send an employee home despite them not showing symptoms, you're not following government guidance. Therefore, you should pay the employee in full to avoid any potential risks. If the employee is self-isolating based on government guidance then it's good practice to provide sick pay through usual procedures at least, if not full pay.

## 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 statutory sick pay (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. The individual may not have to provide a doctor's note, as staff can self-certify with symptoms of flu without a doctor.

## Q: What should I do if Coronavirus becomes more widespread?

**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 workplace policies and 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.**

## Employer support with the Coronavirus

If you have questions or just want guidance through a sickness absence issue, speak to a Croner expert today on **0844 561 8133**.