

# **CORONAVIRUS (COVID19)**



## **EDUCATION RESTART**

**GUIDANCE ON ABSENCE RELATING  
TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)  
ADVICE FOR PRINCIPALS,  
MANAGERS AND STAFF**



Department of  
**Education**

[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

# Guidance on Absence Relating to Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advice for Principals, Managers and Staff

(Published 28/09/2020)

1. The health, safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff is of paramount importance to all education employers in the sector. The following guidance has been produced so employers and employees are aware of arrangements regarding absences in relation to COVID-19.
2. This guidance should be read alongside the latest Public Health Agency (PHA)/Government guidance, to support Principals/Line Managers and staff when planning their return to the work place. In particular, we draw your attention to the [Guidance on Supporting Staff to Return to Schools](#) (updated 10 August 2020). For non-school based staff please [click here](#).
3. Decisions regarding an employee's attendance at the work place should be taken in line with the latest (PHA) guidance. Staff must keep their Principal/Line Manager informed on attendance issues.
4. The following guidance applies to employees subject to NJC/JNC and TNC terms and conditions including substitute teachers and non-teaching staff providing emergency cover for the period of time they have been engaged to work.
5. Procedures for other absences not related to COVID-19 remain extant.

## Definition of COVID-19 Symptoms

6. The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:
  - **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
  - **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
  - **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Most people with COVID-19 have at least 1 of these symptoms.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms>

**The following Scenarios 1-6 apply to all staff. This includes both substitute teachers and non-teaching staff providing emergency cover for the period of time they have been engaged to work.**

### **SCENARIO 1: No symptoms of COVID-19**

- This includes when no member of your household have symptoms.
- Those who fall into vulnerable categories should refer directly to Scenario 3 below.
- If an employee has no symptoms of COVID-19 as described above the current PHA advice is that staff can attend their work place if required and in line with Government advice including social distancing guidelines. Other arrangements, for example, working from home will require planning and regular contact with the Principal/Line Manager.

### **SCENARIO 2: You or a member of your household, test positive or display symptoms of COVID-19**

- If an employee or a member of their household tests positive or is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 they must self-isolate immediately and follow PHA advice for their recovery.
- Staff self-isolating, without symptoms, will continue to receive **normal pay** and will be required to work from home, where feasible, during any isolation period.

#### **2a) Employee or a member of their household display symptoms of COVID-19**

- Staff who are displaying symptoms have a duty of care to themselves and others so therefore must self-refer to be tested immediately. [To self-refer follow this link.](#)
- Employees in this situation must refrain from attending work, and follow medical advice (available via telephone from your GP or [NHS 111](#)).
- Where the employee or individual/s within the household have received a **negative result**, it is important to still apply caution. If everyone with symptoms who was tested in their household receive a negative result, the member of staff can return to work providing they are well enough and have not had a fever for 48 hours. This COVID-19 absence will be excluded from any calculation of

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contractual sick pay. The employee will receive **normal pay**. There will therefore be no impact on absence trigger points or contractual sick pay.

- The employee must keep their Principal/Line Manager informed throughout this period.

## 2b) Employee or a member of their household test positive for COVID-19

- If a member of the employee's household tests positive for COVID-19 the employee must be tested. Anyone who tests positive will be contacted by the Contact Tracing Service in the Public Health Agency, and will need to share information about their recent interactions.
- The employee must not return to work for 14 days<sup>1</sup> or until their symptoms have gone (whichever is later). If an employee's symptoms are continuing after 14 days<sup>1</sup> they should seek advice from their GP or [NHS 111](#) before returning to work.
- Employees in this situation should refrain from attending work for a minimum of 14 days\* and follow medical advice (available via telephone from your GP or NHS 111). Any such COVID-19 absences will be excluded from any calculation of contractual sick pay. The employee will receive **normal pay**. There will therefore be no impact on absence trigger points or contractual sick pay.
- The employee must keep their Principal/Line Manager informed throughout this period.

## SCENARIO 3: Employee is advised to self-isolate due to falling into a vulnerable health group

- As defined in the supporting information below some employees will fall into categories specified as Clinically Vulnerable or Clinically Extremely Vulnerable with respect to the effects of COVID-19. There is an onus on employing authorities and managers to take extra measures to support our most vulnerable staff to self-isolate or engage in social distancing as appropriate.
- The Principal/Line Manager should undertake an individual risk assessment for each relevant member of staff prior to returning to the school/work place.
- Where possible these employees should work from home. It is recognised that for the majority of school based staff it may not be feasible to work from home. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Staff living alone would only be required to refrain from work for 10 days or until their symptoms have gone (whichever is later).

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however the view of the Chief Medical Officer and PHA that schools adhering to the Departmental guidance as set out in Northern Ireland Re-Opening School Guidance (New School Day) are safe places of work and study.

- A relatively small number of employees in vulnerable categories may be advised to continue to self-isolate or work from home on medical advice related to their condition despite the pausing of shielding. In such circumstances they shall receive their **normal pay**. Working from home will require planning. The employee must keep the Principal/Line Manager informed throughout this period.
- For more information on vulnerable categories please refer to categories 3.3 and 3.4 of the Guidance on Supporting Staff to Return to schools/ work place as highlighted above.

#### **SCENARIO 4: Employee is directed by their Principal/Line Manager not to attend their place of work due to a temporary closure relating to COVID-19**

If an employee is directed by their Principal/Line Manager, not to attend their place of work due to a temporary closure e.g. a school (or a particular year group/department/bubble) on a short-term basis due to a COVID-19 outbreak, following agreement from the employing authority/ DE, they shall receive their **normal pay**. Where possible these employees should work from home or other agreed work place and return to work when directed to do so.

#### **SCENARIO 5: Other PHA/ Government directives to self-isolate or quarantine relating to COVID-19**

##### **5a) Test and Trace and Protect requirement to self-isolate**

- The N.I. Executive has rolled out a Test and Trace and Protect strategy designed to control the spread of COVID-19 and staff are expected to follow the advice and obtain a test for COVID-19. For more information refer to;
  - a) The Guidance on [Supporting Staff to Return to Schools](#) or
  - b) The Guidance on [Supporting EA Staff to Return to the Work Place](#)
- If a member of staff is advised through Test and Trace and Protect to self-isolate they should not attend the workplace, arrange to be tested and minimise contact with others where possible. The member of staff will continue to receive normal pay for this period and will be required to work from home, where feasible, during any isolation period. Where an individual has had a negative result, it is important to still apply caution. If everyone with symptoms who was tested in their household

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receive a negative result, the member of staff can return to work providing they are well enough and have not had a fever for 48 hours.

### New StopCOVID NI Proximity App

- The [StopCOVID NI Proximity App](#) was released in July 2020 to assist in stopping the spread of COVID-19 in Northern Ireland, by anonymously contacting people who have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. All staff are encouraged to [download this free application](#) to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

### 5b) Requirement to quarantine due to travel outside of the UK and Ireland

#### Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice

- It is appreciated that the situation concerning travelling outside the Common Travel Area is uncertain at this time and official advice may change. Staff must ensure they follow Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice regarding foreign travel. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to advise against non-essential international travel, except to the countries and territories listed on their exemptions page. Quarantine arrangements are a legal requirement and staff cannot attend the work place during an imposed quarantine period.
- Any staff likely to be affected by quarantine arrangements as detailed below should ensure that they notify their Principal/Line Manager at the earliest opportunity so they can assess if working from home is feasible and be fully informed on pay implications. For ease of reference 2 scenarios have been identified linked to staff travel related quarantine implications;

#### **1. Staff who are subject to new quarantine rules while abroad (unforeseen).**

Staff who have travelled to a country which is added to the UK quarantine list during their stay will be required to quarantine upon their return. As this is unforeseen staff will continue to receive **normal pay** and will be required to work from home, where feasible, during any imposed quarantine period.

Where an employee cannot do their normal work at home during the quarantine period, the Principal/Line Manager should consider whether it would be reasonable to redeploy them to alternative duties that they could carry out at home.

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- 2. An employee who travels abroad in full knowledge of the requirement to self-isolate on their return** will be required to bring this to their Principal/Line Manager's attention, prior to departure, to facilitate an open conversation about the potential impact of this including discussing the feasibility of working from home during the quarantine period.

Where working from home is not feasible, the following options (or combination of options) should be considered as appropriate:

- take additional paid annual leave (where the contract of employment allows for this)
- take paid special leave<sup>2</sup>
- make up the days over a period of time (where the contract allows for this to prevent a loss of pay)
- take unpaid special leave
- take unpaid leave
- redeployment to alternative duties that they could carry out at home

It must be emphasised that there is no automatic entitlement in this category to normal pay for this period of quarantine upon their return to Northern Ireland.

Consideration will be given to granting paid special leave on an exceptional basis if travel is for compassionate reasons.

Examples of reasons for considering a compassionate approach might include:

- attending a close family funeral
  - receiving urgent and serious medical attention
  - accompanying a family member requiring urgent and serious medical attention
  - complying with urgent legal responsibilities overseas
  - supporting a relative overseas who needs urgent and immediate help
- In June 2020 TNC reached an agreement relating to pre-existing holiday arrangements or commitments and quarantine arrangements for the academic year 2020/21. Teachers, Principals and Vice-Principals who had pre-booked holidays arranged prior to the announcement of quarantine arrangements and

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<sup>2</sup> For more information for teaching staff [click here](#) and [here](#) respectively  
For non-teaching information [click here](#)

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who may be required to isolate after travelling abroad, will be required to work from home during any isolation period.

## SCENARIO 6: Staff who have a child who is required to self-isolate a result of COVID-19

- The exceptional circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic have particularly impacted on staff with dependants. It is recognised that in an emergency situation a member of staff may be unable to attend school/work place in their usual capacity at very short notice due to their child being required to self-isolate for a period of time as a precaution against COVID-19 and there being no one else available to care for the child.
- In these specific circumstances the member of staff should be facilitated to work from home. If the nature of the individual's job prevents this the member of staff, in these circumstances and for the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, may request **exceptional dependant leave** from their Principal/Line Manager up to a maximum of ten working days (pro-rated for part time staff) on normal pay.
- In all other circumstances staff with dependants should continue to investigate and source all care options available to them in order that they can attend the school/work place. Principals/Line Managers and staff can also refer to the [Responsive Working Toolkit](#) for more information on the range of existing flexible working and special leave options available to support them.

## Other Supporting Information

### Concerns about coming to work

- If an employee has any concerns regarding their attendance at work they should discuss this with their Principal/Line Manager in the first instance who will contact the Employing Authority if necessary.

## Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and Clinically Vulnerable groups

- The Education Sector will have employees who are in various defined vulnerable groups. In some cases this may necessitate the need for working at home or remaining out of the work place. Guidance has been provided [Guidance on Supporting Staff to Return to Schools](#) (updated 10 August 2020). For non-school based staff please [click here](#).

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- [Click here](#) for advice and further information on those considered Clinically Vulnerable.
- [Click here](#) for advice and further information on those considered Clinically Extremely Vulnerable.

### Additional PHA advice on pregnancy during COVID-19

- [Click here](#) (HR FAQs) for further information on supporting pregnant staff in the work place.

### Employees with Disabilities

- The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), covers a very wide range of people and is not confined to those who come within the Government's COVID-19 list of clinically extremely vulnerable people. The reasonable adjustment duty applies to all employees or job seekers who are disabled, regardless of whether they are on the Government's list or not.
- Managers should make reasonable adjustments, as they are obliged to do, in addition to what they will have done to protect the health and safety of all of their employees. Where suitable risk assessments have been conducted and adequate precautions taken, all that some employees may need is reassurance. If a disabled employee previously had tailored adjustments at work, these might still adequately meet their particular needs when they return to work.
- For more information please refer to section 4 of the Guidance on Supporting Staff to return to schools/ work place as highlighted above.

### Evidence in relation to COVID-19

- Staff may be required to provide evidence, including medical evidence where appropriate, confirming the necessity for them or their dependant to self-isolate. Staff will be afforded a reasonable period of time to provide evidence post recovery or requirement for self-isolation in relation to any of the scenarios above (e.g. medical correspondence). If diagnosed with an illness unrelated to COVID-19 then the absence will revert to normal sickness scheme procedures.
- If applicable staff can obtain a self-isolation notice via the following NHS website: <https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note>

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## Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities (BAME)

- As there is some evidence which suggests that COVID-19 may impact disproportionately on some groups with underlying health conditions, notably Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME), EA and managers should ensure that they support positive action measures such as the Occupational Health Service (OHS) providing practical support and advice to BAME staff, particularly if they are anxious about protecting themselves and their families.
- All Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff with underlying health conditions and disabilities, who are over 70 or who are pregnant should be individually risk assessed and appropriate reasonable work place adjustments should be made following risk assessment.
- For more information please refer to section 5 of Guidance on Supporting Staff to return to schools/ work place as highlighted above.

## What is social distancing?

- [Click here](#) for advice and further information on social distancing
- For the latest N.I. Direct guidance and information [click here.](#)

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