

## **GUIDANCE ON ABSENCE RELATING TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**

### **ADVICE FOR MANAGERS AND STAFF 20/03/2020**

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 the sickness absence scheme in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19).

The decision on whether an employee attends work should be taken in line with the latest Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance. Your line manager should be kept informed.

The following guidance applies to employees subject to NJC/JNC or TNC terms and conditions.

#### **Definition of COVID-19 Symptoms**

- Fever of 37.8 and above and/ or
- Recent onset of a continuous cough.

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

- This includes where 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 workplace as normal but should consider **social distancing** in line with Government advice. Other arrangements, for example, working from home will require planning and regular contact with your manager.

#### **SCENARIO 2: You have symptoms or a member of your household displays symptoms of COVID-19**

- If an employee or a member of their household is displaying symptoms of coronavirus they must self-isolate and follow PHA advice for their recovery. 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 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.
- An employee must not return to work for 14 days\* or until their symptoms have gone (whichever is later). If an employee's symptoms are continuing after 14 days\* they should seek advice from their GP or NHS 111 before returning to work.
- The employee must keep their Principal/Line manager informed throughout this period.

*\*Staff living alone would only be required to refrain from work for 7 days or until their symptoms have gone (whichever is later).*

#### **Please Note**

*This guidance includes current advices from the PHA and may be subject to change. In the event of new information or guidance a further update will be issued. Please also refer to the **Guidance for Educational Settings** page at the following link: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>*

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

As defined below many employees will fall into categories specified as more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. There is now 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.

- Where possible these employees should now work from home.
- Employees in vulnerable categories required to self-isolate or work from home shall receive their normal pay. Working from home will require planning and regular contact with your manager.

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

- If an employee is directed by their Principal/Line Manager, not to attend their place of work due to a temporary closure, following agreement from the employing authority/DE, relating to coronavirus they shall receive their normal pay. Where possible these employees should work from home or other agreed workplace and return to work when directed to do so.
- Where a school is closed to pupils only, staff will still be expected to attend their place of work unless instructed to the contrary.

SCENARIOS 1, 2, 3 and 4 will apply to both substitute teachers and non-teaching staff providing emergency cover for the period of time they have been engaged to work.

### **Certification information**

Staff may be required to provide evidence of the necessity to self-isolate and where applicable diagnosis. Staff will be afforded a reasonable period of time to provide evidence post recovery, of any isolation (e.g. medical correspondence). If diagnosed with an illness unrelated to coronavirus then the absence will revert to normal sickness scheme procedures.

### **Staff with caring responsibilities**

In an open letter to the Education Sector dated 19 March 2020 the Education Minister, Peter Weir confirmed the following:

#### ***“Salaries***

*All employees will receive normal pay across the range of circumstances that we are facing whether they remain in the workplace, are working from home or are unable to carry on working due to circumstances beyond their control. Substitute teachers and non-teaching staff (including temporary and fixed term employees) will also receive their normal pay for the period of time that they have been engaged to*

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*work. Contingency arrangements are being put in place to ensure that the payrolls can be processed and payments made.”*

## **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 who will contact the Employing Authority if necessary.

### **Vulnerable groups**

The Education Sector will have employees who are in the vulnerable groups where they could be looking at months of working at home. This group includes those who are:

- Pregnant
- Aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- Under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (broadly anyone instructed to get a flu jab each year on medical grounds).

For further details click the Government link below:

[COVID-19: guidance on social distancing and for vulnerable people](#)

There are some clinical conditions which put people at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. It is expected that the NHS will directly contact people in this category with advice about the more stringent measures that should be taken in order to keep themselves and others safe.

[COVID-19: guidance on social distancing and for vulnerable people](#)

[COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection](#)

### **What is social distancing?**

Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce the social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). For further information is available at the Government link below:

[COVID-19: guidance on social distancing and for vulnerable people](#)

These include:

1. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough

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2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to [employer guidance](#) for more information
4. Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs
5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services

Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is pragmatic.

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