



Do you employ staff?

Corona Virus Information for Employers

Following on from our last HR Update provided on 4th March 2020, we thought it would be a good idea to provide a further update on the information that is currently being provided by the Government and how this relates to employers.

This situation is very changeable so please note that this advice is correct as of today, 10th March 2020, and it may be subject to change. We will update you with additional information as and when this becomes available.

Emergency Corona Virus Legislation

The Government have confirmed that they are currently working on proposals for Emergency Corona Virus Legislation, which should be introduced in the House of Commons on an unspecified date later this month. It is expected that this legislation will contain several measures that will both help to prevent the Corona Virus from spreading further and help support those who are affected or required to self-isolate. Whilst we're still waiting for the details on what will be contained in this legislation, we do know it will contain the following:

- Changes to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP); usually SSP is payable from the fourth day of absence onwards, if the employee is eligible to receive it. However, on the 4th March 2020 the Prime Minister announced that SSP will temporarily become payable from day one of an absence for those who are affected by the Corona Virus (including self-isolation). This means that you will be required to pay SSP from the first day of the absence, not the fourth. It is not yet clear when this change will be implemented, or whether this change will be extended to all absences for any illness or restricted to Corona Virus related absences only.
- Protection for Volunteers; additional employment safeguards are expected to be put in place for employees who currently volunteer in health, community health or social care settings. If you have an employee who also volunteers in the health sector, it is expected that this employee would receive a protected employment status

that would allow them to take up to four weeks leave from their job role to volunteer, without their job role being affected. This change is being considered because the Government is keen to support volunteers as this will help to provide the additional support necessary to deal with the Corona Virus, as the NHS was already understaffed before the Virus began affecting the UK. The current information is that this protection will be offered to skilled, experienced or qualified volunteers, but again, we currently only have minimal information on this.

More information will be provided on the above bullet points as soon as it becomes available.

Possible Changes to Self-Isolation

Currently, only people who have been to areas where there are high levels of Corona Virus, people who are exhibiting symptoms of Corona Virus, or people who have been in close contact with someone who is infected, are advised to self-isolate themselves for 14 days (after checking with the NHS 111 advice line). However, over the next 10 – 14 days, this advice could change so that even people with “minor” signs of respiratory tract infections, or a fever, are advised to self-isolate. This means that you may have employees who are required to self-isolate for a period of 7 days, instead of the usual 14, if they are experiencing minor symptoms. It is hoped that the isolation of people experiencing minor symptoms will help to prevent further cases of Corona Virus, although an implementation date for this advice has not yet been provided. As stated in our newsletter dated 4th March 2020, employees who are required to self-isolate can continue working from home, if possible.

Advice for the Workplace

A lot of people are panicking about the Corona Virus, as can be seen by the large scale “panic buying” and the inaccurate information circulating on social media. As an employer, you should attempt to manage this panic, and the spread of the Corona Virus, by taking the following steps:

- Ensuring the workplace is as hygienic as possible. Employees should be encouraged to keep their workstations clean and tidy, and to follow the advice and guidance provided by the Government and Public Health England. You are also responsible for ensuring employees have sufficient access to soap and hand dryers / paper towels (cloth / cotton towels are not recommended because they can harbour germs), and for ensuring the overall cleanliness of the workplace. It could be that additional cleaning is required in shared spaces and on stair rails, etc.
- Where possible, try encouraging your employees to only focus on the information provided by the BBC, the Government, the NHS and Public Health England. Information from less reputable sources should be ignored as there is currently widespread “fake news” inciting panic and causing confusion.
- Any employees who are deliberately attending work when they should be self-isolating, can be subject to investigation and possible disciplinary proceedings, due to the deliberate risk they are imposing upon their colleagues and the workplace as a whole. Whilst this may feel like a strict measure, you have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all employees, which may involve “punishing” employees for disregarding advice and exposing the workplace to the virus.
- Providing clear and reassuring communication. Have you informed your employees of how any isolation / Corona Virus related absences will be managed? Are employees aware of the steps you are taking to ensure

the workplace is hygienic? Many people are feeling anxious or even fearful, but clear communication can help to alleviate these concerns and help people to feel calmer and reassured.

We will endeavour to provide further employment related updates as and when further information becomes available.

How Can We Help

If you have any queries relating to the content of this newsletter, or any other HR related topic, please don't hesitate to contact us via hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk