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POA Circular 029/2021

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Dear Colleagues

REVISED GUIDANCE FOR COVID RELATED ABSENCES

Enclosed for your information is the latest guidance from HMPPS that clarifies the procedures to be taken when dealing with staff absences due to Covid 19 and the effects of Long Covid.

In a recent letter from Phil Cople to all Governors he reiterated the following:

“A new document has been produced to help support attendance in the workplace with a focus on those employee’s affected for longer than the norm by the virus. Managers are now required to record Covid related sickness absence on SOP when the absence extends beyond 10 days. The supporting attendance guidance gives a clear message that managers should continue to manage all cases individually, being mindful of protected characteristics and their obligations under the Equality Act 2010, tailoring actions accordingly.

*In some cases, our embedded attendance systems may trigger attendance warnings and in some cases sick pay limits may be reached. **Our policies allow for discretion and it is expected that managers will use that discretion in cases that are affected due to the longer term impact of Covid, for example it may be appropriate to extend sick pay to maintain an appropriate rate of pay for those facing financial detriment. It is also important to be mindful of any unintended consequences of managing attendance that may result in someone returning to the workplace when they should remain off sick or self-isolating in line with Government guidelines.***

Managers should also be mindful of where Covid has impacted on other health conditions for example where treatment has been postponed or due to underlying medical conditions that have developed as a direct result of Covid and use appropriate discretion in managing these cases. It is expected that all cases will be considered on their own individual medical

circumstances and we encourage managers to discuss appropriate reasonable adjustments and phased returns to work, where appropriate.”

The guidance goes live on April 12th. Any issues that cannot be resolved locally should be escalated to Area NEC representatives.

Members should note that the POA have been consulted on these changes but do not agree with the guidance or what we see as a draconian and unsympathetic approach to Covid absences and its long-term effects.

Please ensure all POA members are made aware of this new guidance (Attached).

For and on behalf of the NEC.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Fairhurst', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair

ENCLOSURE



Ministry
of Justice

Coronavirus (COVID-19) HR Policy Guidance

Supporting Attendance v6

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Purpose

1. This guidance provides HR teams with information on supporting attendance during the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19). It provides recommended approaches, guidance on policy and sources of advice. It should be read alongside the departmental Supporting Attendance/Attendance Management Policy, Coronavirus (COVID-19) HR Policy Guidance and FAQs and Looking After Your Wellbeing and Mental Health products. You may also want to refer to Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested on Gov.uk. Departments should review this in conjunction with their own departmental HR policies, seeking legal advice if necessary before sharing outside of HR policy teams.

2. This guidance includes recommended:

- temporary changes to the Supporting Attendance Policy for those employees with any of the main symptoms of coronavirus;
- approaches to other sickness absence cases, including the long-term health effects for those who have had COVID-19, referred to in this guidance as COVID-19 - long term health effects ('Long Covid'). Whilst Long Covid is not a medically defined term it is referenced here to differentiate between the main condition COVID-19 and its secondary or long-term health effects. Long Covid is covered in the section titled COVID-19: long term health effects (Long Covid)
- approaches to sickness absence impacted or prolonged by coronavirus.

If you have any questions please email: contact.us@csep.gov.uk.

Principles (applicable during the coronavirus pandemic)

3. Departments and agencies should use this guidance alongside their departmental Supporting Attendance/Attendance Management Policy. <https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/probation/probation-instructions/Probation-Instructions-2017/pi-2017-01>

4. The following principles should be used to help ensure managers and employees work together to support attendance in a way which reflects the current coronavirus situation.

5. Sickness absence where an employee has any of the [main symptoms](#) of the coronavirus and is in the [self-isolation period](#), must be automatically disregarded for attendance management trigger points/consideration points. The main symptoms of coronavirus are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature (37.8 degrees and above) and/or
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia).

A full description of the symptoms of coronavirus can be found on the [NHS website](#).

6. Employees may be sick with coronavirus related symptoms more than once and this guidance should be followed each time as necessary. Managers can remind employees about the [guidance on staying safe and social distancing](#) which helps to reduce employee risk and potential repeated periods of illness.

7. Departments should ensure they look after the health and wellbeing of their employees and must follow the Government's advice about health and safety, including advice about protecting the most vulnerable individuals.

8. Sickness absence that might be a direct result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, for example, a deterioration of mental health or delays in processes or receiving treatment, are not automatically disregarded for attendance management trigger points/consideration points but should be dealt with supportively by managers, with an assessment made of whether a disregard is provided or formal action is appropriate.

9. Managers should consider all cases individually, being mindful of protected characteristics and their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and tailoring actions accordingly. Managers should not ignore unsatisfactory attendance but take a supportive approach and seek to progress and resolve cases informally wherever possible.

10. Managers should be aware that some groups of people are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. These may, but will not always, relate to some long-term health effects sometimes referred to as Long Covid. Managers should be aware that some symptoms of COVID-19: long term health effects (Long Covid) are analogous to other health conditions and illnesses. Managers should ensure they consider parity of approach.

11. Where formal action is deemed to be necessary, managers must consider workplace adjustments and other available options, for example Occupational Health (OH), only moving to dismissal where there is deemed to be no reasonable alternative. If the employee is already subject to a final written improvement warning it may be more appropriate to extend the period of this warning rather than proceed to dismissal.

Supporting Attendance Procedures during the coronavirus pandemic

12. Managers should take a supportive approach, managing attendance in a fair and transparent way.

Reporting, recording and handling absence

13. Departments and agencies should apply their current attendance management policy and procedures for employees reporting sickness absence.

Sickness with any of the main symptoms of coronavirus

14. Where an employee has developed any of the main symptoms of coronavirus (as described by [NHS](#)) the absence must be recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet.

15. Employees with any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed coronavirus must follow the Government guidance: [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#).

16. Employees should be encouraged to take advantage of the Government [testing](#). It is important that employees understand the personal benefits of symptom testing, and the positive impacts for controlling and limiting the spread of coronavirus. If an employee tests positive and is not fit for work this should be treated as sickness absence and recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet.

17. Where the symptoms continue after a negative result, departments can extend the automatic disregard to cover these absences. This is a delegated matter for departments and can be tailored to department needs. Managers will have regard for the importance of driving positive behaviours towards testing in relation to employees. Managers should consider all aspects leading to an absence, including the likelihood of coronavirus and past absence history, when considering how best to support staff with their attendance. Where changes are needed, managers should update attendance management reporting systems with the reason for absence.

18. If an employee, who is currently off sick with a non-coronavirus related illness, develops coronavirus symptoms their current absence should be closed and a new absence recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet. Managers should keep in touch and amend records when an employee has recovered.

19. Where an employee's absence has been recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet, if symptoms exhibited do not support suspected/diagnosed coronavirus, then the record should be amended to reflect this. This will also apply where an employee returns a negative test (where one has been taken). At this point the absence will be closed on the daily reporting spreadsheet and a new absence opened on the SOP system in line with our normal attendance processes.

20. In line with the Government [Stay at home](#) guidance, employees, who are well enough, can return to work at the end of the [self-isolation period](#) if their symptoms have gone or if they continue to have just a cough or anosmia. This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone.

21. Where an employee remains unfit for work at the end of the [self-isolation period](#), managers should treat any ongoing sickness as a new, reclassified period of absence, using the most prominent symptoms.

Note: There may be some exceptional, acute confirmed cases of COVID-19 sickness absence. Employees hospitalised with COVID-19, on the basis that they could still be contagious whilst in hospital, should continue to be recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet. There may be other ongoing cases e.g. employees undergoing medical treatment for severe symptoms that can also continue to be recorded in this category. Managers should be mindful that some groups of people are disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Note: Whilst a new absence should be opened on SOP the absence should also remain on the daily reporting spreadsheet for reporting purposes.

Asymptomatic employees

22. If an employee is not presenting with any symptoms of COVID-19 ('asymptomatic'), but has been given the opportunity to take an LFD and/or PCR test and has received a positive result for COVID-19 they should [stay at home and self-isolate](#). If the employee remains fit for work during the [self-isolation period](#), they should work from home in their current role or an alternative role where available. If the employee is unable to work from home, special leave with pay should be granted for the duration of the period of self-isolation. This type of absence should be recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet.

23 If the employee develops the main symptoms of COVID-19 whilst self-isolating and is subsequently unfit for work they should inform their manager and the absence should be recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet.

COVID-19: long term health effects (Long Covid)

24. Some employees, following the onset of symptoms of COVID-19 that were either suggestive of, or confirmed through a positive PCR test, may still feel unwell for several weeks or months after they are no longer infectious. Other employees may initially feel as though they have recovered, only to suffer a relapse or multiple sporadic periods of sickness at a later date. This is often referred to as Long Covid, 'post-Covid syndrome' and 'post-acute COVID-19 syndrome', another common name is 'long hauler'.

25. There is currently no precisely defined consensus on the point in time that Long Covid begins. There are many reported Long Covid symptoms, including those listed on the: [Your Covid recovery website](#) and on the [GOV.UK website](#).

26. Managers should view such cases sympathetically and in line with their business as usual absence procedures, in the same way they do for other long term health conditions or illnesses.

27. Managers can make a referral to Occupational Health (OH) at any time they are concerned that an employee's health is affecting their attendance. It is strongly recommended that where longer term absences may be linked to Long Covid, OH referrals are undertaken early, for example after the [self-isolation period](#). Where it has not been possible or appropriate to make an early OH referral, the manager should consider making a referral when the absence exceeds 28 days. <https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/support/hr/wellbeing-and-attendance/Attendance>

Fit notes/isolation notes

28. If an employee is absent with any of the main symptoms of coronavirus [as described by the NHS](#), they must **not** contact their GP for a 'Fit Note'. Usually, employees provide self-certification when they are absent from work for 7 days or less due to sickness absence but, as the [self-isolation period](#) for coronavirus is longer than this, managers are able to ask their employees to obtain an [isolation note](#) instead. This should be provided as early as reasonably possible.

29. If an employee opts to self-certify, they should be asked to obtain an isolation note for the immediate period beyond the self-certification as appropriate.

30. Managers are able to [check](#) the isolation note is valid by entering the 16 digit reference number from the isolation note and the employee's date of birth into the [GOV.UK site](#).

31. If an employee remains ill after the end of the [self-isolation period](#), they should then be asked to provide a Fit Note.

32. Managers should be sympathetic in situations where an employee has difficulty obtaining a Fit Note because of increased demands on the health service or where their GP is reluctant to provide a Fit Note and refers back to [NHS advice](#).

32. Managers should be sympathetic in situations where an employee has difficulty obtaining a Fit Note because of increased demands on the health service or where their GP is reluctant to provide a Fit Note and refers back to [NHS advice](#). This should include reviewing ½ and nil pay dates and any warnings that may have been triggered.

33. In circumstances where an employee and their manager are working from home and a Fit Note has been provided to the employee, managers should ask their employees for a copy of the Fit Notes and inform them that they should retain the originals, as the manager will require sight of these when the coronavirus phase comes to an end.

34. Managers should keep in touch with their employees for the duration of the absence.

<https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/probation/probation-instructions/Probation-Instructions-2017/pi-2017-01>

Return to work following sickness with any of the main symptoms of coronavirus

35. You do not have to conduct formal Welcome Back discussions. An informal welcome and update on important developments, work priorities, etc. will suffice.

36. It is essential that an employee does not receive any undue pressure from their manager to return to their full range of duties/hours until they are fully fit to do so. Managers should consider individual circumstances, potential [COVID-19: long term health impacts](#) and other medical conditions that may arise or be exacerbated as a direct result of coronavirus.

37. Managers may find it helpful to seek advice from OHS and/or EAP about any support or adjustments that employees might require. Managers should discuss with the employee and implement workplace adjustments where it is appropriate to do so.

Considerations for managers

38. Employees may suffer secondary illnesses as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. For example they could suffer poor mental health or find that symptoms of existing conditions are worsened during the coronavirus period, for example due to the reprioritisation of NHS services.

39. If the initial assessment by the manager is that the absence is as a direct result from the impact of the coronavirus situation, then the disregard of trigger/consideration points could also be considered. This will be for departments and managers to determine based on the merits of each individual case. It may be more appropriate for the manager to hold an informal discussion rather than a formal meeting with the employee, even if they have already reached their trigger point.

40. In line with departmental guidance, managers should be prepared to view cases sympathetically and to support the employee. Managers should discuss with the employee and implement workplace adjustments where it is appropriate to do so. Managers should also obtain further advice from Occupational Health and the Civil Service Workplace Adjustments Service. <https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/support/hr/wellbeing-and-attendance/Attendance>

Formal Health and Attendance Improvement meetings during the coronavirus pandemic

41. For absences not related to coronavirus, if an employee's sickness absence level reaches the trigger/consideration point, formal health and attendance Improvement meetings can still be held, provided that the meetings can be conducted in private with no interruptions. It is reasonable that these meetings can be held via a video call such as Skype or Facetime (using only departmental approved video conferencing where using official laptops) or via telephone conferencing (where that is available). Where it is not practicable to hold a meeting virtually, for example when an employee and their manager are in the workplace with other employees around, then a face-to-face meeting can be held but consideration will need to be given to [Staying alert and safe \(social distancing\)](#).

42. This also applies to those matters where the informal action has been unsuccessful or informal action isn't appropriate, and the matter is to be resolved through the procedure for managing unsatisfactory attendance.

43. Meetings can go ahead virtually during the coronavirus social distancing period, provided:

- each person (including the Trade Union representative/companion) attending the meeting is able to join remotely, via video conferencing (subject to them having access to adequate IT) or via telephone;
- any different workplace adjustments which are needed to allow a meeting to go ahead in this manner have been considered as necessary;
- each person is able to ensure their privacy and freedom from interruptions when joining the remote meeting; and,
- arrangements are in place, and the meeting is structured to ensure that individuals can confer in confidence with their Trade Union representative/companion when needed, for example by building in breaks or pausing the meeting on request.

44. There may be circumstances in which a virtual meeting is not feasible, for example due to inadequate IT, connectivity issues, a lack of privacy, or the ability of an individual to use specific technology due to a disability. These cases should be managed on a case by case basis to determine what is reasonably possible.

45. If the employee or their companion cannot reasonably attend the meeting, the employee should be asked to propose new dates to the manager to allow the meeting to take place. Under normal circumstances we would expect this to be within five working days of the original meeting date however, managers should be flexible in agreeing a date for the meeting to take place. Employees should be given a reasonable opportunity to make arrangements but the meeting should not be unreasonably delayed on the basis that a specific companion is unavailable.

46. During the coronavirus pandemic, the availability of an employee's chosen companion might be more limited than usual. For example, they might have more caring responsibilities. The employer should consider if a delay of more than 5 days is reasonable in the circumstances.

47. Where an employee has genuine concerns about a meeting being handled virtually the manager must listen to the employee and take their concerns and wellbeing seriously and sympathetically. Managers may wish to consider Occupational Health advice as this may be beneficial. Where those concerns cannot be addressed, the manager will need to consider whether it is appropriate for the meeting to go ahead or whether a postponement is the best way forward.

48. In considering postponement the manager will need to consider the likely length of the delay and how this will impact on those involved. In all cases a delay in resolution is likely to cause anxiety and employees should be reminded about and signposted to Employee Assistance Providers and other forms of support.

Support at Formal Health and Attendance Improvement Meetings

49. Employees have a statutory right to be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or work colleague at a virtual meeting in the same way that they can at a face-to-face meeting where the formal meeting could result in:

- a formal warning being issued;
- appeal hearings.

50. Employees can identify a Trade Union representative (who may be an elected representative or a paid union officer) or work colleague to accompany them at a virtual meeting in the same way that they can at a face-to-face meeting.

Written Improvement Warnings during the coronavirus pandemic

51. If the employee's absence is not related to coronavirus symptoms and they have reached their trigger point, the manager is able to use their existing discretion on whether to give a Written Improvement Warning.

52. Each case of sickness is unique, and managers are expected to use their discretion to make reasonable and informed decisions. The manager should consider the circumstances of the absence and the employee's absence history and their wellbeing to arrive at a fair and balanced decision. If a period of sickness absence is connected to coronavirus, for example, mental ill health or significant delays in assessment or treatment, arising from the current situation, managers should be sympathetic and consider whether formal action is appropriate.

53. Departmental Attendance Management/Supporting Attendance policies and procedures/processes will continue to apply when it is not appropriate for a Written Improvement Warning to be given.

54. Additional discretion should be considered relating to dismissals during the coronavirus phase and whether it is appropriate to extend a final written improvement notice as an alternative to dismissal.

55. If an employee is absent from work on special leave for a continuous period of more than 28 calendar days the manager should consider whether it would be appropriate to either extend the period for the written improvement notice or put the process on hold until the period of special leave ends.

Occupational sick pay

Sickness with any of the main coronavirus related symptoms

56. Departments and agencies must ensure that they protect employees from being financially disadvantaged in line with government remit that - “no one should be penalised for doing the right thing”.

57. Departments and agencies should consider any impact with their payroll providers and others as required.

58. It is recommended that departments and agencies: provide full contractual pay for:

- sickness absence associated with [any of the main](#) coronavirus related symptoms that are recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet.

Sickness absences prolonged by coronavirus

59. Departments can use their existing arrangements, e.g. Sick Pay at Pension Rate, to temporarily adjust sick pay, such as extending sick pay or other measures, to maintain an appropriate rate of pay for those facing financial detriment. This might be considered when normal sick limits apply during sick leave that has been extended due to postponement or cancellation by the NHS of diagnostic tests, operations or other treatments for reasons related to the coronavirus phase. Adjusting sick pay can also be considered in Long Covid cases in the same way as sickness absence due to other health conditions or illnesses. This is a delegated matter for departments.

60. Where there are delays to process because of the impact of coronavirus, for example applying Ill Health Retirement, Injury Benefit and Injury absence processes (see section below), departments may wish to also consider extending those arrangements for these purposes.

Self-isolation at the request of a surgeon or health care team - pre (and post, where appropriate) surgical procedure

61. Amendments to the Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) regulations extend the right to receive SSP to individuals who are unable to work because they are staying at home and self-isolating due to coronavirus - including prior to surgery on the advice of a surgeon or healthcare professional.

62. Therefore employees who are not fit for work and have not exhausted their 28 week SSP entitlement are eligible for Statutory Sick Pay for up to 14 days before the date they are due to be admitted to hospital for the purpose of undergoing the procedure. Departments are advised to temporarily adjust sick pay if the employee is not fit for work, on nil pay (i.e no Occupational Sick Pay payable) but is still eligible for SSP. Further details can be found in the [SPP employer guide](#).

63. If an employee is required to self-isolate at the request of a surgeon or health care team - pre (and post - where appropriate), surgical procedure and are fit for work managers should refer to Coronavirus (COVID-19) - holiday, special leave & other time off - HR guidance and FAQs for further information.

Ill Health Retirement, Injury Benefit and Injury absence

64. The Scheme Medical Adviser, HML, often requires GP and other Specialist's reports to enable them to assess whether people meet the eligibility criteria for certain benefits including ill-health retirement and injury benefit. Because there may continue to be demands on the NHS for some time, there may be delays in processing applications by HML (please note the guidance at [Scheme Medical Adviser - Coronavirus/COVID-19 update for employers](#) which advises departments on how they can help applications to be processed as quickly as possible).

65. In order to avoid gaps in payments for members caused by delays in receipt of GP or Specialist reports, departments may wish to consider temporarily adjusting sick pay arrangements to allow an existing rate of pay to be extended for a longer period when pay would otherwise reduce or cease. The following applications are likely to be impacted during this COVID-19 period:

- ill-health retirement
- temporary injury benefit awards under the Civil Service Injury Benefit Scheme (which top up sick pay)
- injury absence on full pay before normal departmental sick pay arrangements are applied (under the Civil Service Management Code and known in some departments as "sick leave excusal").

Departmental queries on Ill Health Retirement, Injury Benefit and Injury absence should be sent to cspsemployerenquiries@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Sickness absence and supporting attendance FAQs

Q1. What should I do if an employee is sick with coronavirus symptoms?

In line with [Government advice](#), employees with any of the main symptoms of coronavirus, must follow the [PHE 'Stay at home' guidance](#). Employees should be encouraged to take advantage

of the Government [testing](#). It is important that employees understand the personal benefits of symptom testing, and the positive impacts for controlling and limiting the spread of coronavirus. If an employee falls sick with symptoms whilst in the workplace, employees should follow their own departmental guidance <https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/covid-19-coronavirus/staff-and-managers2/nhs-test-and-trace>

Employees who have mild symptoms but feel fit for work can work from home where possible, either in their own role or an alternative one. General guidance on coronavirus related sickness is available from the NHS.

Managers must not give employees who are sick with the symptoms of coronavirus an attendance warning for this period of absence. This sickness absence is automatically disregarded for attendance management trigger points/consideration points.

Q2. If the employee has coronavirus symptoms should it be recorded as sickness absence?

If an employee is sick with coronavirus symptoms and is not fit for work, it should be recorded as sickness absence.

HMPPS are recording COVID absences via a daily reporting sheet which each department completes.

Q3. If an employee has symptoms of the coronavirus, do they need to have a test?

Employees who have the main symptoms of coronavirus are encouraged to use the NHS test and trace service to get tested.

Q4. If an employee was not tested for COVID-19 but had symptoms, how should it be recorded and how does this affect the trigger/consideration point?

Given that testing was not commonly available at the start of the pandemic, where an employee developed any of the main symptoms of coronavirus (as described by NHS) the absence should have been recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet and the absence disregarded for attendance management trigger points/consideration points.

Where an employee continues to feel unwell for several weeks or months following the onset of symptoms, managers should ensure that their treatment of these individuals is in line with their treatment of employees who had COVID-19 confirmed through a [positive PCR test](#) and also continue to feel unwell.

Q5. If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, should it be recorded as sickness absence?

Absence following a positive test should not be recorded as sick leave unless the employee becomes unwell. Instead, if the employee is unable to work from home special leave with pay should be granted for the duration of the [period of self-isolation](#).

Q6. How do I update the sickness absence record for an employee who receives a negative test result for coronavirus?

If any changes are required as a result of a negative test result, the reason for sickness can be updated by managers with effect from the date of the test result. However, this decision should be undertaken by the manager having consideration for the employee's symptoms at the time.

Q7. How are multiple absences that are due to the main symptoms of coronavirus treated?

Employees may be sick with the main symptoms of coronavirus more than once. Managers should encourage individuals to get tested and remind them of the general gov.uk guidance on [staying safe and social distancing](#) which would help reduce their risk and repeated periods of illness.

If testing returns a negative result, the reason for sickness can be updated by managers with effect from the date of the test result and the sickness absence dealt with under normal procedures.

Q8. If an employee is absent with any of the main coronavirus symptoms as described by the NHS, do they need a GP certificate or fit note to confirm their absence?

In line with [NHS](#) guidance, employees must not contact their GP for a 'Fit Note' if they are ill with any of the main coronavirus symptoms. Managers should instead ask their employees for an [isolation note](#) that starts from the first day of symptoms, and covers the employee up to the end of the [self-isolation period](#). Managers are able to [check the isolation note is valid on NHS 111](#) (<https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/check>) by entering the 16-digit reference number from the isolation note and the employee's date of birth. Where an employee opts to self-certify for their first 7 days, they should be asked to obtain an isolation note for the immediate period beyond self-certification and to the end of the [self-isolation period](#).

Managers should keep in touch with their employees for the duration of the absence.

Q9. How does sickness absence relating to any of the main symptoms of the coronavirus affect the trigger/consideration point?

This sickness absence is automatically disregarded for attendance management trigger points/consideration points. There is no need to conduct formal Welcome Back discussions. An informal welcome and update on important developments, work priorities, etc. will suffice.

Q10. How does sickness absence relating to the longer-term or secondary post-viral effects of the coronavirus affect the trigger/consideration point?

The rationale for the automatic disregard for sickness absence relating to [any of the main](#) symptoms of the coronavirus is to encourage employees to do the right thing and not spread infection during the period they may be contagious and where they should be self-isolating. Where an employee remains unfit for work beyond the [self-isolation period](#), managers should request a Fit Note in line with usual processes and treat any ongoing sickness as a new, reclassified period of absence, using the most prominent ongoing symptoms.

There is not an automatic disregard for individuals who are experiencing [longer-term](#) or secondary post-viral effects of the coronavirus. Managers are encouraged to be sympathetic, making decisions based on the merits of each individual case during the pandemic including whether a disregard of trigger/consideration points should be provided. Managers should keep

themselves updated with Government guidance on [COVID-19: long-term health effects](#), and the additional guidance contained within that website.

Q11. How do variable or sporadic periods of post COVID-19 sickness absence affect the trigger/consideration point?

Whilst there is not an automatic disregard for individuals who are experiencing [longer-term or secondary](#) effects of COVID-19, managers are encouraged to be sympathetic, making decisions based on the merits of each individual case.

In line with guidance on long term health conditions, managers can increase a trigger/consideration point as a workplace adjustment. Managers should obtain further advice via an Occupational Health referral help inform this decision.

Q12. How does ongoing or sporadic periods of post COVID-19 sickness absence affect sick pay?

Where an employee remains unfit for work at the end of the [self-isolation period](#), managers should usually treat any ongoing sickness as a new, reclassified period of absence, using the most prominent symptoms. This would impact on the accrual of occupational sick pay unless managers temporarily adjust sick pay based on the circumstances. This should align to their business as usual approach to other health conditions or illnesses.

Q13. How are subsequent non coronavirus absences treated where occupational sick pay has been adjusted for a coronavirus related absence?

If the Covid absence was recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet there would not be an impact on the accrual of occupational sick pay for future absences.

Q14. Should employees with coronavirus symptoms as described by NHS, be referred to occupational health?

Employees with any of the main symptoms of coronavirus, as described by NHS, do not have to be referred to occupational health (OH) for specialist medical advice on their symptoms and prognosis, but should refer to the NHS website for advice.

However, it is strongly recommended that OH referrals are undertaken early in suspected Long Covid cases, for example after the [self-isolation period](#). Where it has not been possible or appropriate to make an early OH referral, the manager should consider making a referral once the absence exceeds 28 days. Where an OH assessment is necessary, OH suppliers will advise on how this will be handled. OH are increasing telephone/skype appointments with employees. Suppliers will support managers and employees, where they can, with advice in respect of alternative arrangements for assessments. Suppliers will be updating departments on a regular basis with any service/medical updates.

Q15. How should coronavirus absences that involve hospitalisation be treated?

Some employees may suffer severe symptoms to such an extent that treatment in hospital is required. Given the difficulty separating the contagious phase from the non-contagious phase and the likelihood that some of the main symptoms may persist, these cases should continue to

be recorded via the daily reporting spreadsheet, with the automatic disregard continuing. This is particularly important due to the fact that managers may have difficulty obtaining a medical opinion relating to contagion and an OH referral would be unlikely to be appropriate in these circumstances.