

## Pandemic Policy

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to provide a planned, structured and co-ordinated way of working in the event of a pandemic.

The impact of a pandemic is generally observed in waves (peaks of high occurrence – followed by troughs). Past pandemics have spread globally in two and sometimes three waves over a period of months.

Based on data from previous pandemics, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that a significant proportion of staff could be affected. In these circumstances, rates of absenteeism could see the disruption of services such as power, transportation and communications. It is also anticipated that schools could be closed to prevent the spread of infection or due to staff shortages.

The company recognises that the impact of a pandemic outbreak would be significant, and consequently there could be a time when existing working arrangements are insufficient and new arrangements would be required.

The company may need to implement parts, or all, of this policy should local (Corsham area) circumstances, or circumstances at customer sites, require it ahead of or alongside national or global status.

This policy is developed in the context of a duty to provide services to existing and new customers whilst maintaining the health and safety of staff. Its aim is to support the adoption of a consistent approach to the management of employment issues likely to arise during a pandemic.

The company's response to a pandemic outbreak will require a great deal of flexibility and commitment from staff and a similarly flexible approach to policy which is reflected in the special arrangements outlined in this document.

## **2. Management of Attendance**

### **2.1 Notifying Absence**

Normal principles should be followed in line with the existing sickness absence policy reporting procedure.

This means that staff must notify their absence within 30 minutes of their normal start time, give reasons for their absence and provide an indication of how long their absence is likely to last.

Special arrangements for notifying absence to a 'designated competent person' may be introduced in the event of a pandemic. When this applies the central contact point will be the Head of HR or anyone nominated by the Head of HR.

## **2.2 Remaining in Contact**

Unless it was very evident from the outset and agreed at initial contact that a longer period of absence is involved, all staff should make further contact every day to provide an update on their situation and indicate a likely date of return.

## **2.3 Self Certification**

Due to the expected increase in pressure at GP surgeries during the pandemic, there may come a point where staff will not be required to provide a certificate from their GP. Self-Certification for all sickness absence will be applied at an appropriate point during the pandemic.

The Company may decide to arrange for staff sickness relating to the pandemic to be verified by its own clinical staff.

All staff will be informed in advance of when changes to the normal process for certifying sickness will be implemented. Sickness absence will require a GP certificate prior to this change.

## **2.4 Returning to Work**

Staff who have been absent specifically due to illness caused by the pandemic will be given specific advice regarding their return to work which should ensure that they are not infectious on their return from the 'designated competent person'. Medical exclusion (as per existing arrangements for diarrhoea and vomiting) may apply which would be subject to Public Health England guidelines.

## **2.5 Returning to Work after visiting a Pandemic area**

### **Returning from travel where the guidance did not change whilst travelling**

Staff returning from overseas travel (holiday, etc) to an area where there were no quarantine directives in place upon return to the UK or the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) have not previously advised against non-essential travel will be required to consider any risks of infection and exposure to themselves and therefore their colleagues arising out of that travel. If they believe they have been exposed to any risk then they should telephone HR prior to returning to work.

### **Returning from travel where guidance changed whilst on holiday**

Where medical exclusion (including quarantine and directions to isolate) apply, staff must follow such directions and notify HR immediately they become aware of this. In such circumstances, arrangements regarding work will be discussed on an individual basis and may include a requirement to work from home, or special leave (unpaid) for the duration of the medical exclusion.

## **Travelling against guidance**

Any special leave or working from home arrangements would not apply where an individual has elected to travel, to an area against the advice of the FCO or PHE, note this includes areas in the UK where there are heightened risks of infection and transmission. Such travel is strongly discouraged, and any subsequent medical exclusion would most likely be treated as unpaid unauthorised absence and may be subject to disciplinary.

If you fall ill during this period of absence, regardless of cause, you will only be covered by Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), this will not be covered by Company sick pay (CSP).

In all circumstances you should consider, prior to any long distance or foreign travel, the infection and transmission risks you could expose yourself and your colleagues to and the aforementioned rules will be applied

Note: the above policy includes heeding advice from PHE equivalents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

## **2.6 Unwell at work**

Any staff showing symptoms of the illness caused by the pandemic should be sent home and advised to refrain from work until they are no longer considered to be infectious (in accordance with any guidance from the Department of Health and Social Care).

If sent home from work, the day will be considered as authorised absence with full pay.

Thereafter, normal absence reporting, and sick pay arrangements apply, and consequent days will be recorded as sickness absence.

## **3. Requirement to attend work**

Where staff may be concerned about attending work every attempt will be made to alleviate their concerns by giving them support and all available information about the pandemic and the risk to infection. With the expected high levels of sickness absence during the pandemic, it is essential that all staff that are fit and well attend work as normal.

Where staff refuse to come into work with no reasonable grounds, this will be treated as unpaid unauthorised absence. Further action, including an investigation under the Disciplinary Policy, may be taken at the discretion of the Head of HR and Directors once the pandemic is over.

## **4. Annual Leave**

Staff having time away from work to maintain their health and wellbeing is regarded as important and attempts will be made to uphold leave arrangements wherever possible. However, it is also noted that the World Health Organisation predicts that any pandemic is likely to last for many weeks, possibly several months, which does mean that continuing to provide essential operational services may result in annual leave needing to be rescheduled. Such a decision would not be taken lightly and would be managed as follows:

#### **4.1 Requesting Leave**

Any request for leave will be at the discretion of the Directors, Line Managers, and Head of HR, but will be monitored for consistency across all staff groups.

#### **4.2 Cancelling booked leave**

Individuals may be required to cancel booked leave.

It is acknowledged that in some instances, the impact of this may be that staff are unable to go on pre-paid holidays.

Requiring staff to cancel booked leave and miss out on pre-paid holidays will only occur in exceptional circumstances. If this became necessary, staff would be reimbursed for any loss not covered by insurance or other means and following the provision of the appropriate paperwork.

#### **4.3 Holidays 'after the event'**

The aim following a pandemic would be to enable staff to take time off wherever possible, particularly after a very busy time. Depending on how long a pandemic period lasted, it may not be possible to accommodate all leave.

Where staff are prevented from taking their annual leave in the current leave year, they will not lose this entitlement. They will be able to carry forward leave in excess of the normal arrangements and/or annual leave may be bought back from individuals by agreement.

### **5. Carers Leave**

(If a dependant falls ill or is injured or if care arrangements break down).

During a pandemic staff will be asked to do their best to avoid a requirement for such leave and are required to plan ahead and consider alternative childcare arrangements, for example in the event of school closures, or a disruption in existing child care or other dependent care arrangements.

Where staff are unable to work in their normal place of work or to do their normal hours because of carer responsibilities they should discuss alternative possibilities with their manager to try and find a means of meeting their caring obligations whilst still being able to work.

In the event alternative care or working arrangements are not possible, then the existing relevant leave would apply, and all requests will be dealt with individually and agreed subject to the contingencies of the service.

In the event leave has been exhausted and alternative working arrangements are not possible, then a combination of annual leave and unpaid leave can be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the requirement to balance the needs of the service with the needs of the member of staff.

Full consideration should be given to treating staff fairly and wherever possible avoiding an over reliance on staff who may not have childcare or other caring responsibilities.

## **6. Compassionate Leave**

Compassionate leave for staff who are bereaved or who have a close relative or dependant who has a terminal illness will remain unchanged and staff will need to apply for leave in the normal way in accordance with current policy.

## **7. Study Leave and Training**

All normal study leave and training which could impact on staffing or the ability to maintain critical services will be postponed until the pandemic is over and normal service has resumed. However, staff may be requested to attend training that is particularly relevant if they have been re-deployed to other areas, for example in emergency procedures and infection control.

Where staff are undergoing a formal course of study and are due to sit an examination, the position regarding leave will be reviewed with them on an individual basis.

## **8. Re-allocation of staff and changes to work patterns**

It is envisaged that a pandemic will result in an increased workload, coupled with a reduction in available staff. It may therefore be essential to increase our ability to respond by asking staff to work additional hours and/or to work differently.

### **8.1 Flexibility Clause**

We reserve the right to temporarily alter or change any part of your terms and conditions such as locations or job role within your competencies. This may mean that you are required to work in another health/social care organisation, which may or may not be part of our group of companies, however your employment remains with us as a company and you retain the right to revert to your original terms at the cessation of the pandemic.

### **8.2 Alternative Work/Working elsewhere**

There are a number of circumstances which may apply that would result in staff being asked to take up alternative employment activities on a temporary basis. This may include administrative, support and managerial staff as well as any staff whose services have been stood down.

For example:

- Where the member of staff's usual service has been temporarily suspended
- Where their place of work has been temporarily closed
- Where the member of staff has difficulty accessing their normal place of work
- Where a change in duties or location would enable a pattern of working that resolved any difficulties with childcare or other caring responsibilities
- Where there is a need to transfer staff to keep critical service areas going
- Where there is a need to lend support across the wider health and social care community

Consideration will be given to relevant skills, experience and personal circumstances. Staff will not be expected to undertake roles for which they are not competent and appropriate training, induction and support will be provided to equip them for the role they are assigned to. Uniforms and protective clothing will be supplied where appropriate.

Home working will be considered for some posts and would be reviewed on an individual basis.

In the event of a change in work location any additional travelling costs from home to work will be reimbursed in line with current expenses policy.

In the event of a disruption in the transport infrastructure, the company will endeavour to provide support through alternative transport arrangements where possible and practical to do so to enable staff to attend work.

### **8.3 Alterations to Work Patterns**

Providing more services out of normal working hours may be necessary and therefore any member of staff may be asked to work during the evening or night and at weekends in order to ensure adequate cover.

Shift patterns and other working arrangements may need to be revised. Provisions and payments for unsocial hours will be implemented. Staff will be expected to comply with any temporary alterations to those stated in their contract of employment. There will be no permanent change to the contract of employment and normal working hours will be resumed once the pandemic is over.

## **9. Pay Arrangements**

Staff will be paid at their normal rate of pay regardless of the work they are required to perform during the period of a pandemic.



Part time staff asked to increase their hours or full-time employees asked to work additional hours will be paid in accordance with existing arrangements.

Staff will be reimbursed the additional expenditure in home to work travel arising from a change in their place of work.

Although every attempt will be made to run the payroll as fully as possible, depending on the capacity and availability of the service, it is possible that payment for additional hours or responsibilities will have to be made in arrears. During the period of a pandemic outbreak we will guarantee payment via electronic transfer of your basic salary. Any adjustments will be made after the pandemic.

## **10. Working Time Regulations**

The working time regulations provide that in general staff should not be asked to work in excess of 48 hours per week, nor asked to work without appropriate rest. This is calculated over a defined reference period which averages the number of hours per week over an agreed period.

The working time regulations will remain in force, but it is envisaged that the current restrictions on hours worked in a defined reference period may need to be relaxed for some staff.

This will be achieved by extending the reference period for averaging working time to 26 weeks for those posts likely to be most affected by requests to extend working hours. If required, this will be fully discussed with individuals who would be asked to agree to short term exceptional arrangements.

If extending the reference period for designated staff, due regard will continue to be given to ensuring they have appropriate rest breaks or compensatory rest.

In the event it was necessary the reference period could be further extended to 52 weeks but would again be by agreement with the individuals concerned.

Any special arrangements would be for the duration of the pandemic only and only used in exceptional circumstances.

## **11. Terms and conditions**

Changes to normal working arrangements during the period of a pandemic will be temporary and will not constitute a change to terms and conditions of employment.

A number of employment processes may be handled differently in terms of timescales during the period of emergency, for example disciplinary or grievance hearings may be delayed, although arrangements for any suspension from work for a potentially serious matter would continue to apply. Decisions would be taken regarding the circumstances of each case.

## **12. Support for staff**

In order to meet the potential demand, consideration will be given to obtaining additional resource to support staff.

Staff will be supported in as many ways as possible in order to allow them to attend work and some of the measures are covered above under section 9. Staff will also be allowed to contact home during work time in order for them to be reassured about family/friends they may be concerned about.

## **13. Policy Review**

It is hoped that this policy will not be required in practice.

In the unfortunate event that it is, we recognise that staff who work for the company are renowned for their commitment to meeting the needs of customers and all companies with the group highly value the importance of this goodwill.

We also recognise that it would be a testing time for all concerned and are committed to working together and being flexible in response to the demands we may face.