CORONAVIRUS: ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

In case coronavirus (COVID-19) spreads more widely in the UK, employers should consider some simple steps to help protect the health and safety of staff.

It's good practice for employers to:

- keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure in the workplace.
- make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date.
- make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus and are clear on any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace develops the virus.
- make sure there are clean places to wash hands with hot water and soap and encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly.
- provide hand sanitiser and tissues for staff and encourage them to use them.
- consider if protective face masks might help for people working in particularly vulnerable situations.
- consider if any travel planned to affected areas is essential.

Employers must not single anyone out. i.e. They must not treat an employee differently because of their race or ethnicity.

Sick pay

The workplace's usual sick leave and pay entitlements apply from day one if someone has coronavirus.

Employees should let their employer know as soon as possible if they're not able to go to work.

Pay if someone has to go into self-isolation

The government has made clear that if NHS 111 or a doctor advises an employee or worker to self-isolate, they're entitled to statutory sick pay. If the employer offers contractual sick pay, it's good practice to provide this.

The employer might need to be flexible if they require evidence from the employee or worker. For example, someone might not be able to provide a sick note ('fit note') if they've been told to self-isolate for 14 days.

The employee must tell their employer as soon as possible if they cannot work. It's helpful to let the employer know the reason and how long they are likely to be off for.

If an employee is not sick but the employer tells them not to come to work
If an employee is not sick but their employer tells them not to come to work, they should get their usual pay. For example, if someone has returned from China or another affected area and their employer asks them not to come in.

If an employee needs time off work to look after someone

Employees are entitled to time off work to help someone who depends on them (a 'dependent') in an unexpected event or emergency. This would apply to situations to do with coronavirus.

For example:
- if they have children they need to look after or arrange childcare for because their school has closed
- to help their child or another dependent if they're sick, or need to go into isolation or hospital

There's no statutory right to pay for this time off, but some employers might offer pay depending on the contract or workplace policy.

The amount of time off an employee takes to look after someone must be reasonable for the situation. For example, they might take 2 days off to start with, and if more time is needed, they can book holiday.

If employees do not want to go to work

Some people might feel they do not want to go to work if they're afraid of catching coronavirus.

An employer should listen to any concerns staff may have.
If there are genuine concerns, the employer must try to resolve them to protect the health and safety of their staff.

For example, if possible, the employer could offer flexible working.

If an employee still does not want to go in, they may be able to arrange with their employer to take the time off as holiday or unpaid leave. The employer does not have to agree to this.

If an employee refuses to attend work, it could result in disciplinary action.

If someone becomes unwell at work

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace and has recently come back from an area affected by coronavirus, they should:
- get at least 2 metres (7 feet) away from other people
- go to a room or area behind a closed door, such as a sick bay or staff office
- avoid touching anything
- cough or sneeze into a tissue and put it in a bin, or if they do not have tissues, cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow
- use a separate bathroom from others, if possible

The unwell person should use their own mobile phone to call either:
- 111, for NHS advice
- 999, if they're seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk

They should tell the operator:
- their symptoms
- which country they've returned from in the last 14 days

Find out more on the following and more about sick pay & time of for dependents at:
https://www.acas.org.uk/advice

For up-to-date information on the Coronavirus:
https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response