

# Temporary Changes to Organisational Policies and Procedures for COVID-19

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Organisations should consider introducing a policy which sets out temporary changes to existing policies and procedures, to take into account the impact of COVID-19. This is likely to be quicker and easier than reviewing and amending every policy for a temporary period. Once the COVID-19 situation becomes less serious, organisations can then review the temporary arrangements, update them and rename it a crisis management or disaster response policy or similar, which can take effect in the case of flood, fuel supply shortages or other significant public health issue.

Here's a suggestion for such a policy:

## Policy introduction

State here why temporary changes are being made. For example:

“As coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) continues to spread, we recognise that our organisation needs to adapt its ways of working.

We want to help reduce the spread of coronavirus and safeguard the welfare of our staff during the coronavirus outbreak, while continuing our operations as normally as possible.

This policy explains what temporary changes we are making to our usual policies and procedures on sickness absence, flexible working, travel, and annual leave during the global health crisis.”

## Substantive Content

Now, list the title of each policy which requires to be temporarily changed for the circumstances, state the normal policy position and then state what the temporary 'crisis management' position is.

For example:

### Absence Reporting

#### What is our normal policy?

Under our normal short-term sickness absence policy, if you fall ill and cannot attend work, you would be required to:

- notify your line manager before you are due to start work, or as soon as possible if that is not practical; and
- provide medical evidence (typically, a Fit Note from your doctor) for sickness of more than seven calendar days' absence.

#### What is changing temporarily?

During the coronavirus situation, it is vital that you do not attend work and self-isolate for seven days if you develop:

- a fever, particularly a high temperature (ie a temperature of 37.8 degrees or over); and/or
- a continuous cough,

You should still notify your line manager of your absence before you are due to start work, or as soon as possible if that is not practical.

You do not have to get medical advice from NHS24 to self-isolate. However, if your symptoms worsen during self-isolation or are no better after seven days, you should contact NHS24 online. There is a tool at [111.nhs.uk/service/covid-19](https://111.nhs.uk/service/covid-19) for you to carry out a check if you think you have symptoms.

If you have no internet access, you should call NHS24 (111). Please dial 999 only if you have a medical emergency.

If possible, you should avoid going to your doctor, hospital or pharmacy to prevent infection from spreading.

You will still be expected to:

- explain to your line manager what your symptoms are and the medical advice you may have been given; and
- keep in regular contact with your line manager.
- Given the coronavirus situation, you must make sure that your line manager has a telephone number and e-mail address where they can reach you if you are in self-isolation.

### **Other Policies**

You would then repeat the above style for each policy that you've identified as requiring to be relaxed and/or amended for a crisis situation.

Things to consider here are, for example:

- ICT/Data Protection policies – can data and paperwork be taken home/accessed from home (safely and securely, of course) where this is normally prohibited? What about Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) – should this be relaxed during such times?
- Working from home – is this only restricted to certain job roles normally, and should it be expanded during a crisis?
- Accessing e-mails from home – is this normally prohibited but should be relaxed during self-isolation?
- Place of work – can staff work from other sites if their normal place of work is closed? What is the impact on travel expenses?
- Meetings/events/training – does your current workplace practice require staff to attend certain meetings etc. but you want to reduce that or prevent some of that to reduce spread or to maximise staff time on other areas if you anticipate staff absence due to self-isolation etc.?
- Annual leave – how prescriptive is your current policy on when staff can cancel leave that they had previously booked? You should consider relaxing this if they can't travel, don't want to travel or cancel it due to workplace demands as a result of colleagues being absent. What about having unused leave at the end of the leave year as a result? Can employees carry forward unused days in these circumstances?
- Working hours – consider the introduction of flexible working, particularly if schools are closed or care providers introduce changes, allowing staff to look after family and loved ones. What about working additional hours in a crisis, for example covering for colleagues who are self-isolating? Will TOIL arrangements or overtime payments be introduced/changed?