

CORONAVIRUS COVID 19



Member briefing no 3 7th April 2020

The situation with Covid 19 is changing on a daily basis. Following questions from members below are some general guidelines. The information is taken from various sources (IBEC, DAFM) and it is important to recognise that every business is different and that measures taken must be appropriate to the business. This information should be viewed in conjunction with your own internal HR and other procedures and policies. These may also change as time progresses

Before considering the 4 scenarios below it is important to note the following

1. Where the employer is carrying out their business in line with the HSE guidance (social distancing, hand sanitisation, staggering working hours, employees that don't need to be on site working from home etc) then there is no reason why an employee should not be attending for work. It is entirely reasonable for the employer to expect them to do so apart from the scenarios outlined below.
 2. It is also important for companies to advise staff that, as far as possible, they will respect the staff member's confidentiality in any incident of suspected or confirmed Covid 19. This requires everyone - the individual, their manager and their colleagues, to actively respect this confidentiality too.
 3. In advance of any potential increase in absence, it is essential that all employees are fully familiar with your company policy requirements, with regard to what constitutes acceptable reasons for absence, the notification and certification requirements and the social welfare procedures.
 4. You should nominate a Manager or other person in the company to be the Covid 19 contact person and this is the name and number that should be given to HSE by an individual if they are involved in scenarios 1, 2 or 3 below
- **Scenario 1:** Where a staff member contacts their manager from home to let them know that they have symptoms of COVID-19
 - **Scenario 2:** Where a staff member advises from home that they themselves or a member of their immediate family is a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection
 - **Scenario 3:** Where a staff member shows symptoms of Covid-19 while in work
 - **Scenario 4:** Where a staff member is afraid or anxious due to Covid 19 and does not want to come to work. .

Scenario 1: Where a staff member contacts their manager from home to let them know that they have symptoms of COVID-19 <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/symptoms-causes.html>

- The manager should advise the staff member to stay at home and if they have not already done so to **contact their GP** by phone or call HSE live on 1850 241850 for further guidance.
- The manager should ask the staff member to give his/her number as a company contact point should the HSE decide that the case requires contacts tracing through the employer. **HSE** will then advise the company of the next steps.
- Managers should also ask the member of staff to maintain communication with them, requesting to be kept informed if, ultimately, they are diagnosed with COVID-19. This is a confidential process between the manager and the member of staff and should remain so.
- The staff member is advised not to inform colleagues of their symptoms/suspicions as it might cause unnecessary distress. HSE will advise the company of any action that needs to be taken.
- If the staff member is capable of doing so, the staff member may carry out duties from home.
- The company's own policy related to the management of sick leave will apply if the employee is advised to self isolate and is incapable of working from home.

Scenario 2: Where a staff member advises from home that they themselves or a member of their immediate family is a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection;

- The staff member should inform their manager of any instructions they have received from the HSE. In this scenario it is almost certain that the HSE advice will be that the staff member should remain at home. In such a case, the staff member should follow all advice and should not come into work until cleared to do so by medical advice.
- If the staff member is confirmed as positive for COVID-19, Public Health officials will interview the staff member in order to identify and trace known contacts. This could mean that other colleagues may be contacted individually and asked to present themselves for testing and possible self-isolation. The manager and colleagues should treat this process sensitively, as it is a very worrying time for people.
- As much flexibility and support as possible should be given to staff. Throughout this process everyone should respect confidentiality to avoid causing unnecessary worry. Managers should, in turn, ask these members of staff to keep communicating with them on a regular basis.
- At this point in time, the HSE advice is that, in this scenario, there is no need to carry out any additional cleaning, or isolation of other staff unless the HSE so direct. However normal cleaning protocols should be carried out.
- If the staff member is capable of doing so, the staff member may carry out duties from home.
- The company's own policy related to the management of sick leave will apply if the employee is advised to self isolate and is incapable of working from home.

Scenario 3: Where a staff member shows symptoms of Covid-19 while in work;

- If a staff member were to become incapacitated in the workplace, an ambulance should be called immediately - whatever the cause.
- If a staff member shows symptoms of illness, the following procedure should be followed assuming the staff member is not incapacitated.
- If the staff member occupies a single occupancy office, they should remain in that office.
- If the staff member is in an open plan office, they should be offered access to any available private space and contact their GP or call HSE live on 1850 241850 for further guidance.
- If the staff member prefers to go home and deal with the situation from there it is their choice but they must contact GP or call HSE live on 1850 241850 for further guidance.
- The manager should ask the staff member to give his/her number as a contact point should the HSE decide that the case requires contacts tracing through the employer and to keep in touch with the manager. **HSE will then advise the next steps for the manager to take.**

Scenario 4: Where a staff member is afraid or anxious due to Covid 19 and does not want to come to work.

- In normal times we would say someone should be GP certified and compliant with normal sick leave procedures and processes and this would allow you to apply any policy consistently across the organisation.
- However in the current situation it might be pragmatic to take the individual into account e.g. are there particular vulnerabilities/circumstances that the general population of the workforce do not face.
- It may be less and less practical to send employees to the GP during this crisis. If you feel someone is very genuinely concerned then it might be worth moving along with the request rather than resisting.

However you can't facilitate everyone if lots of people present with self-diagnosed anxiety so you may have to fall back onto a hard line.

- Consulting the the list of at risk groups will help with decisions
<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html>