



Helping your employees through COVID-19

This factsheet includes measures available to responsible businesses to help employees stay well during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, with a specific focus on those who may be considered vulnerable.

Regularly refer to the latest government guidance and special announcements

As part of the Spring Budget, the government has already announced a package of measures to support the UK to cope with the immediate economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

Measures for the workforce include:

1. Changes to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and sickness certification.
2. Changes to Universal Credit and Contributory Employment and Support Allowance for people not eligible for SSP
3. A Hardship Fund of £500 million to be delivered through Local Authorities, to support economically vulnerable people and households. Most of this funding is expected to be used to provide council tax relief.

Guidance is changing frequently so [subscribe to receive email alerts](#) from the UK government for up-to-date information.

Support employee wellbeing

Impact to staff may include:

- anxiety or stress over the impact of coronavirus on their health, finances, family and job
- worrying about the effects of remote working or self-isolation
- being unable to access external support networks to support their wellbeing





Business in the Community (BITC) promotes a whole person approach to wellbeing that mental, physical, social and financial aspects. With COVID-19, all these strands of wellbeing are at risk and responsible employers and managers can help reduce those risks for themselves and colleagues to stay well as possible.

Here are some simple steps you can take as an employer to mitigate against those risks for your employees:

Mental

- Make line managers aware of some of the mental health and wellbeing issues that employees may experience during the pandemic.
- Signpost to specific guidance offered through your employee assistance programme or from mental health charities such as [Mind](#) or [Rethink Mental Illness](#).
- Provide timely, consistent, and accurate information to employees.
- Encourage staff to practice or learn about mindfulness and take part in activities which keep them present such as reading, cooking, or something creative.

Physical

Encourage employees to protect themselves and others against Coronavirus by following [NHS advice](#). Download marketing resources related to the current COVID-19 response from the [PHE Campaign Resource Centre](#).

Encourage employees to:

- **Take regular exercise.** This releases anxiety-reducing chemicals, while acting as a healthy distraction. The NHS has guidance on [gym-free exercises](#).
- **Eat healthily.** Good nutrition has a positive impact on your mood.
- **Avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol.** These can make anxiety worse.
- **Help employees develop a bedtime routine to improve sleep.** The sleep hygiene section of our [BITC & PHE Sleep and Recovery toolkit](#) may be useful.





Social

- **Stay connected.** Maintain contact and interaction with others with technology such as video calls and group chats to encourage a sense of community. Working together and sharing resources can help overcome a survivalist 'siege mentality'. Connecting with and looking after each other can be a huge comfort.
- **Encourage** the use of internal staff networks to check up on people who are self-isolating.

Financial

- Employees may be experiencing financial stress with increased utility bills from working from home as well as having concerns over the security of employment with the economic impact of COVID-19.
- Review whether there are any work-related causes that could be impacting employees' financial wellbeing, such as pay, contract type or shift patterns, take action to mitigate those risks.

Consider your low-paid staff

As it stands, Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is £94 a week and only covers employees who earn more than £118 a week. Along with Universal Credit at £74 a week, many low-paid staff may struggle to cover their essential living expenses.

Where possible, employers should be generous with their policies around sick pay and mindful of the financial impact that self-isolation and sickness may have particularly on their lowest paid. Employers should also use this as an opportunity to review and promote their wider employee benefits schemes, and look for ways to alleviate any additional financial hardship or debt that may be the result of a drop in income. For example, consider offering hardship grants or promoting partnerships with low-cost loan providers to mitigate the risks of people turning to payday loan companies to make ends meet.

Be transparent

Employers need to be open and honest in the communications about what decisions they are making as part of their management of the pandemic. [Greggs, the largest bakery chain in the UK](#) were among the first to clearly define their intentions around sick pay for people self-isolating. In a situation changing by the hour, they have also been clear that they may need to review this should things escalate in the longer term. Accommodating uncertainty is vital for maintaining credibility and the trust of your people





Consider contract colleagues

Another important consideration, when planning for the effects of the outbreak should be the impact on contract colleagues. Examples of best practice include [Microsoft, Facebook, Google, and Twitter](#) who announced that they would continue to pay their hourly support staff and contractors even though home working had reduced the need for their services.

Take additional caring responsibilities into account

[Figures released this week](#) show that unpaid labour by women is worth £140 billion to the economy. Much of this takes the form of unpaid caring, for all kinds of dependants. This crisis could see women facing a higher demand to manage these 'second shifts' alongside their day jobs, especially if schools and nurseries close across the country.

Advice to employers

We would urge employers to be clear and practical about how they support their workforce to absorb extra responsibilities, reviewing their emergency dependant's leave and avoid making any gendered assumptions about who will step in.

