



RealityHR

People Driven Business Growth

CORONAVIRUS AND BACK TO SCHOOL

ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES
SEPTEMBER 2020

GET IN TOUCH TO FIND OUT HOW WE CAN HELP...



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This week schools across the UK opened their doors for all pupils for the first time since March and schools in Scotland welcomed back pupils in late August.

As this has coincided with Coronavirus case numbers rising across the country, employers may be concerned about the impact on their people and their business if the child or a member of staff is required to self-isolate.

Employees, too, may be confused about what they need to do if a classmate of one of their children tests positive for the virus or if their child is sent home for 24 – 48 hours to await a pupil's test result.

This all comes at a time when many employers are asking their staff to return to the workplace, which could lead to potential conflict if they have a child who is affected. Here are some answers to common questions that employers and employees may be asking at this time.

WHAT HAPPENS IF AN EMPLOYEE'S CHILD IS SENT HOME FROM SCHOOL TO ISOLATE?

A child who has been in close contact with another child who has tested positive, will be sent home by the school. The child will be required to self-isolate for a period of 14 days. At this point the employee is not required to self-isolate unless their child develops symptoms.

Although the employee is not required to self-isolate at this point, they should be allowed to work from home to care for their child. If they are unable to work from home, you will need to discuss whether the employee can use holiday days, take unpaid leave or go on furlough if eligible.

If the child does develop symptoms the child will be required to get a test and then just as it was during lockdown, the employee along with other family members in the household must isolate for a 14 day period. They may work from home if they are able to, however, if they cannot work from home, then they must not work. You must ensure they receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) provided they meet the eligibility criteria, or you may give them the option to use their annual leave days.

You can ask your employee to provide an isolation note as proof they need to stay off work. The employee can apply for the isolation note through the NHS online system.

IF AN EMPLOYEE IS SELF-ISOLATING BECAUSE THEIR CHILD SHOWED SYMPTOMS OR TESTED POSITIVE, DOES THAT MEAN EVERYONE IN THE WORKPLACE NEEDS TO SELF-ISOLATE?

The parent of the symptomatic child should self-isolate as soon as the child has symptoms.

There is no requirement for anyone else to isolate at this point unless the parent of the symptomatic child develops symptoms or tests positive at which point there would be a requirement for other employees who have been in close contact to self-isolate in accordance with the government guidance. However, employers may choose to take the precautionary measure of advising colleagues working closely with the parent of the affected child to work from home while the child awaits a test result.

Remember, if you choose to send your staff home and they cannot work from home, they would still be eligible for full pay.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A CLASS ARE SENT HOME TEMPORARILY WHILE AWAITING ANOTHER PUPIL'S TEST RESULT?

An employee may be asked by the school to collect their child at short notice and keep the child off school until the test result is back. The employer should check their statutory Time off for Dependents policy which may grant unpaid leave. If not, you should discuss with the employee whether they take holiday or make the time up. Employers should be as flexible as possible in allowing staff to take this time to collect their child where instructed to do so by the school.

CHILDREN RETURNING TO SCHOOLS TYPICALLY LEADS TO AN UPTICK IN GENERAL COLDS AND ILLNESSES FOR OUR WORKFORCE – HOW DO WE MANAGE THIS WHEN IT LOOKS LIKE COVID?

It may not be easy to spot the difference between the common cold and Covid symptoms, and children are notorious for sharing their sneezes and sniffles with their families at this time of year so your staff may come to work with worrying but innocent symptoms. [Government guidance](#) is that children and adults only need to self-isolate and avoid school or work if showing any of the 3 symptoms of high temperature, continual cough or loss of taste/smell, details of which can be found [here](#).

However, some people may show these symptoms when they have just a cold so should staff stop coming to the workplace? Again, the primary driver will be business need and can that person work from home effectively? The risk of them coming into work when they simply have a sniffle is that they pass their cold to others who may then present with a temperature or cough.

This could lead to many staff self-isolating “just in case” simply because one person came to work with a cold. There is no clear-cut answer to this for every business, but it is something to consider and communicate to the workforce so they know what to do in this situation. How this impacts your attendance management policies will also need to be considered.

MY CHILD'S AFTER SCHOOL CLUBS AND BREAKFAST CLUBS ARE NO LONGER RUNNING - HOW CAN I WORK MY 9-5?

Many schools have stopped after school clubs and introduced staggered drop-off times and new rules about transport to school, meaning many parents will still need flexibility during the working day to drop off and pick up children at unusual times.

As an employee, you should speak to your line manager or employer as soon as possible to find out how they can help. You may want to put in a request for flexible working as this could cover a huge range of changes to working days and hours from going from full time to part time, to being exempt from working a particular day of the week.

If you are an employer, you should be as flexible as you can while meeting the needs of your business. If a formal flexible working request is made then you must consider it fairly and respond within 28 days. Full information can be found in our [Flexible Working Requests factsheet](#).

AS AN EMPLOYER, HOW DO I DEAL WITH AN ANXIOUS PARENT WHO IS CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR CHILD GOING BACK TO SCHOOL?

Employers should remember that as well as going back to the workplace, staff may have concerns about their children going back to school – especially because many children have not been in since the end of March.

Every employee should have the opportunity to discuss any concerns that may affect their wellbeing with their manager as part of the return to workplace process.

Mental health may be fluctuating during this uncertain period, so there should be an ongoing conversation about wellbeing during every manager-employee one-to-one.

Don't forget to signpost further advice or support, such as employee assistance programmes and any other wellbeing resources you have available.

While uncertain times continue, employers should do everything they can to support employees while caring for children and should offer as much flexibility and understanding as possible.

If you need support managing flexible working requests or looking after the wellbeing of your teams, we can help. Visit www.realityhr.co.uk/reset for further guidance or contact us at info@realityhr.co.uk.