

Absence from work

Reasons for absence

Apart from annual holiday entitlement, an employee might need time off work for reasons including:

- short-term and long-term sickness, including mental health conditions
- helping a child, partner or relative
- bereavement
- medical appointments
- pregnancy-related illnesses and appointments, including IVF
- bad weather conditions, making travelling to work difficult or impossible

Each workplace might have different rules on what they see as acceptable reasons for absence and what they will pay.

For this reason, every workplace should have its own absence policy, so it's important to check this.

What an absence policy should cover

An absence policy should make clear exactly what's expected from both the employer and employee if the employee needs to take time off work.

An absence policy should include:

- how to report absences, including who the employee should contact and when
- when the employee needs to get a [sick note](#)
- when [return to work](#) discussions will be held and with who
- how and when to [keep in touch](#)
- how the employer [keeps track of absence](#) and if they set any review or 'trigger' points
- whether the employer provides occupational health or an employee assistance programme (EAP) and when this starts
- how much the employee will be paid and for how long – [see more on sick pay](#)

If your workplace does not have an absence policy, the employee can ask their employer or HR manager what to do if they need time off work. The employer should follow best practice as outlined in this guide.

There are some areas that are covered by law, for example:

- [statutory sick pay \(SSP\)](#)
- [sick notes](#) ('fit notes')
- time off to help dependants

Taking time off to help someone else

By law, employees have the right to take a reasonable amount of time off work to help someone who depends on them (a 'dependant') in an unexpected event.

This right only applies to those classed as an 'employee' – it's important to check your [employment status and rights](#).

An employee's dependants can include:

- their spouse, partner or civil partner
- their child
- their parent
- a person who lives in their household (not tenants, lodgers or employees)
- a person who would rely on them for help in the event of an accident, illness or injury. For example, an elderly neighbour
- a person who relies on them to make care arrangements

The employee can take time off if they need to:

- help a dependant who is ill, been injured or assaulted, or gives birth
- arrange care for a dependant who is ill or injured
- deal with the [death of a dependant](#)
- deal with an incident involving their child during school hours

There is no limit to the number of times or length of time that employees can take off for dependants, as long as it is reasonable for the circumstances.

Your workplace might offer employees more entitlements than these minimum statutory rights, so it's a good idea to check.

How employees get paid for time off for dependants is down to the workplace policy, so it's a good idea to check. In some cases it might be unpaid.

Difficulty getting to work due to bad weather or travel disruption

If an employee cannot get to work or is going to arrive late because of bad weather or transport problems, they should tell their employer as soon as possible.

There is no legal right for an employee to be paid for working time they've missed because of bad weather or travel disruption.

Some workplace policies might have different rules, so it's a good idea to check.