

Absence Management Policy

Policy · UK · Updated 2026-07-23 · Square brackets are placeholders to replace with your own details.

An absence management policy — often called a sickness absence policy — sets out how employees report sickness absence, what evidence is needed, what happens when they return, and how the business responds when absence becomes frequent or long-term. It turns absence from a series of awkward one-off conversations into a managed, consistent process.

Unmanaged absence costs twice: once in cover and lost output, and again in the quiet resentment of the colleagues who absorb the work. Most of this policy's value sits in its most boring parts — one clear reporting rule and a short return-to-work conversation after every absence.

This template covers reporting and certification, sick pay signposting, return-to-work discussions, trigger points for frequent short-term absence, and the supportive handling of long-term ill health.

Purpose and scope

This policy applies to all employees of [Your company] and covers sickness absence and unauthorised absence. Annual leave, maternity and other family leave, and emergency time off for dependants are covered by their own policies.

Its aims are to support employees who are genuinely unwell, to keep the business staffed and safe, and to deal with absence fairly and consistently across every team.

Policy statement

[Your company] does not want unwell people at work, and nobody will be criticised for genuine sickness absence reported properly. In return we expect absence to be reported promptly and honestly, contact to be maintained, and support to be accepted in both directions. Absence records are treated as confidential health information.

Reporting absence

1. Telephone [name/role] by [time] on the first day of absence — speak to them personally; a text or message is only acceptable when [state exceptions, e.g. you are physically unable to call].
2. Say why you are absent and how long you expect to be off, and flag anything urgent on your workload for handover.
3. For continuing absence, keep in touch with [name/role] every [frequency, e.g. day or week as agreed] and update your expected return.
4. Report absence yourself wherever possible — asking a colleague to pass a message is only acceptable when [state exceptions].
5. Absence that is not reported under this procedure is unauthorised and may be dealt with under the disciplinary policy.

Evidence and sick pay

For shorter absences, complete our self-certification form on return. For longer absences, a fit note from a doctor or other authorised healthcare professional is required — check current GOV.UK guidance for the thresholds, which this policy follows. If a fit note says you "may be fit for work" with adjustments, we will discuss whether we can accommodate them.

Sick pay: statutory sick pay is paid where the eligibility conditions are met — see current GOV.UK guidance for rates. [State any company sick pay scheme here: amount, duration, qualifying service.] Dishonest absence claims are treated as gross misconduct.

Return-to-work discussions

Your line manager holds a short, private return-to-work conversation after every absence, ideally on your first day back: welcome back, confirm the reason for absence and that you are fit to return, pick up anything we should know or adjust, and complete the return-to-work form in [system/location].

This is a supportive conversation, not an interrogation — but its consistency is exactly what makes it work. Held after every absence, for everyone, it supports genuine sickness and quietly deters the other kind.

Frequent short-term absence

A review is triggered when absence reaches [state your triggers, e.g. number of separate absences or number of days in a rolling 12 months — set levels that fit your business]. The manager and employee meet to look at the pattern, explore causes, and agree support — which may include occupational health advice or adjustments to work.

Where a disability or an underlying health condition contributes to absence, trigger points are adjusted as a reasonable adjustment. Where no acceptable reason for the pattern emerges and it continues, the matter moves to formal stages with warnings, following a procedure mirroring the disciplinary policy, with dismissal only ever the final step after fair process.

Long-term absence

For extended absence, [name/role] agrees a contact routine with the employee — supportive, regular, and at a frequency that suits them. With the employee's consent, we may seek medical advice from an occupational health adviser or their GP to understand prognosis and what would help a return.

Return options include a phased return, adjusted hours or duties, and reasonable adjustments where the Equality Act 2010 applies. Dismissal on grounds of long-term ill health is a genuine last resort, considered only after medical evidence, proper consultation, and a search for alternatives such as redeployment.

Records and review

Absence records, self-certificates, fit notes, and return-to-work forms are health data — special category data under UK GDPR — and are stored in [system/location] with access limited to [roles], in line with our data protection and retention policies.

This policy is reviewed [frequency, e.g. annually] against our actual absence patterns. Owner: [name/role].
Next review due: [date].

How to use this template

1. Set one reporting rule — who is called, by when — that works on every shift you run, including weekends, and name deputies.
2. Choose trigger points from your own absence history, not a textbook, and write down that they flex for disability-related absence.
3. Print the return-to-work form as one page; if it takes longer than ten minutes, managers will stop doing it.
4. State your sick pay terms precisely and check them against your written statements of employment particulars, which must cover sickness terms.
5. Train managers on the difference between supportive contact and pressure — the tone of the first phone call sets the tone of the whole absence.

Official guidance

- › [ACAS — Absence from work](#)
- › [GOV.UK — Time off for family and dependants](#)

This template is provided in good faith and for general information — it is not legal advice. Adapt it to your organisation and, where your sector carries specific legal requirements, have the finished document reviewed by a qualified adviser. The live version at <https://trainedteam.com/templates/absence-management-policy> is kept current; this file is a snapshot.