

Long covid

1 . Sickness and absence from work

For some people, covid-19 (coronavirus) can cause symptoms that last for a long time after the infection. This is called 'post-covid syndrome' or 'long covid'.

People can experience the effects of long covid for weeks, months and even years.

Symptoms can:

- come and go over time
- sometimes get better and sometimes worse

This means it can affect someone's ability to work or cause them to take time off sick.

The organisation's usual rules on sickness absence will apply when someone is off work because of long covid. Check your organisation's policy to find out what these are.

The usual rules for [sick pay](#) will also apply.

Find out more about long covid:

- England – [long covid advice from the NHS](#)
- Scotland – [long covid advice from NHS inform](#)
- Wales – [long covid resources from NHS Wales](#)

What employers should do

Employers should be aware that the effects of long covid can come and go. On some days the person might seem well, but on others their symptoms can be worse and they might need to be off work again.

If someone is off sick, they might feel isolated or need support to return to work. Employers should:

- agree how and when to make contact during any absence
- make sure their work is covered and shared out appropriately while they're off
- talk about ways to support them as they return to work

When the employee feels able to return to work

The employer should talk with the employee about any support they may need. They could discuss:

- getting an [occupational health assessment](#)
- making changes to the workplace or to how the employee works, such as different working hours

- a phased return to work
- what they want to tell others at work about their condition

[Find out more about returning to work after absence](#)

Example of making a change to support an employee

Some days, Bo has severe tiredness and body aches. Their doctor has diagnosed long covid. Bo is ready to come back to work but is worried that working full time will be hard.

Bo's employer looks at the workload and is able to allocate some work to others in the team. This means they can offer Bo part-time hours to start their return to work. They put in a date to review the arrangement.

If an employee is struggling to do their job

If an employer feels the employee is not able to do their work or is taking a lot of time off, they should see if they can do anything to help. For example, a further occupational health assessment to find out if more support is needed.

The employer should make sure they have done everything they can before considering dismissing them. If they dismiss an employee without first carrying out a full and fair disciplinary or capability procedure, the employee could make a claim of [unfair dismissal](#) to an employment tribunal.

[Find out more about dismissing someone because of a capability issue](#)

Support for employers

Employers and managers can get government guidance on supporting employees who are disabled or have a health condition.

[Find support with employee health and disability on GOV.UK](#)

2. Whether long covid is a disability

By law, a disability is a physical or mental impairment that has a 'long-term and substantial adverse effect' on a person's ability to do normal day-to-day activities.

'Long term' means either:

- it will affect them or is likely to affect them for at least 12 months
- it's likely to last for the rest of their life

'Substantial adverse effect' means more than just a minor impact on someone's life or how they can do certain things. This may fluctuate or change and may not happen all the time.

Long covid is still a new condition and it may take time to understand it fully. It can affect a person's day-to-day activities and it's currently understood that it can last or come and go for several months, even years. The effects of long covid could also cause other impairments.

Long covid could be a disability, depending on how someone is affected by it.

Employers should focus on the reasonable adjustments they can make rather than trying to work out if an employee's condition is a disability.

Find out more about:

- [reasonable adjustments](#)
- [supporting disabled people at work](#)
- [disability discrimination](#)
- [supporting mental health](#)

Avoiding discrimination

As well as disability, employers must be careful to avoid other types of discrimination when considering long covid.

Long covid has been found to more severely affect:

- older people
- ethnic minorities
- women

Employers must avoid discriminating by age, disability, race or sex.

[Find out more about discrimination and the law](#)