

# Managing sickness absence

## 1 . Recording absence

As an employer, recording and measuring sickness absence in your organisation can help you to:

- find out if there's a problem with absence levels
- compare your absence levels with similar organisations
- identify the more common reasons for sickness absence in your organisation and look at ways to address it
- explore whether absence levels are higher in certain groups of employees – for example if new starters have lots of absence, there could be an issue with the induction process
- identify underlying causes of absence and decide on the best next steps

## How to record sickness absence

You should record:

- the number of absences
- the length of each absence
- the reason for each absence

Differentiating between the reasons for absence can help you identify patterns and decide what steps to take. For example, a single long-term absence with a clear reason should be treated differently to repeated short-term absences.

You can record absence as part of a 'trigger point' or 'review point' system. This can help you to effectively manage absence, if used in an appropriate way.

[Find out more about absence trigger points](#)

## Avoiding discrimination

When recording absence, you must not discriminate against employees.

For example, a disabled employee might need to take time off work for medical treatment. This means their absence levels could be higher.

Recording some types of absence separately could help you avoid discrimination when you take steps to reduce absence. For example, you could record pregnancy and disability-related absence separately.

Recording these absences separately does not mean you should ignore them. You should still speak to the employee to find out how you can support them.

If an employee is disabled, you must make reasonable adjustments.

Find out more about:

- [discrimination and the Equality Act 2010](#)
- [reasonable adjustments](#)

## Data protection

You should consider data protection rules and confidentiality if you're recording medical information about employees. For example, if you're recording the reasons for employees' sickness absence.

You should:

- be able to give a reason for keeping this information
- make sure you only share it with relevant people

[Find out more about data protection from the Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#)

## 2. Reducing absence

Effectively addressing sickness absence in your organisation can:

- reduce absence levels
- improve employee morale and wellbeing
- boost productivity
- save money

There are different steps you can take to try and reduce absence in your organisation.

## Having absence policies

Having clear absence policies can help you to manage absence in your organisation. Policies will make it clear what's expected of you and your employees if they need time off work.

You should:

- be consistent and fair when using absence policies
- make sure policies are flexible and allow you to take into account employees' individual circumstances

[Find out more about creating absence policies](#)

## Training managers to deal with absence effectively

You should train managers in how to use any absence policies you have.

Managers should know how to:

- apply policies consistently whilst being flexible to individual circumstances
- handle sensitive information, for example details about an employee's medical condition

## Promoting a good work-life balance

A good work-life balance can lead to lower levels of sickness absence.

To support a good work-life balance for your employees, you should:

- encourage them to speak up if they feel they're under too much pressure at work
- train managers to spot signs of a poor work-life balance
- offer flexible working where possible
- encourage breaks from work, including during the day and making sure employees take holiday
- regularly review workloads
- lead by example – if managers and senior leaders have a good work-life balance, this will create a culture for employees to follow

## Creating the right culture

You should create a culture at work where employees:

- feel comfortable raising problems
- trust that the issue will be taken seriously
- know they'll receive the support they need

This will mean employees are more likely to stay in work, even if there's a problem.

## Having return to work meetings

Return to work meetings can help you identify the best way to manage sickness absence. They're an opportunity for you to check an employee has the support they need to be at work.

Using return to work meetings consistently can help you identify:

- any trends in absence across the organisation
- underlying causes of absence

This will mean you can:

- explore whether you need to take any action to address absence in your organisation
- find the most appropriate way to address absence

[Find out more about return to work meetings](#)

## Understanding absence in your organisation

Understanding absence levels and trends in your organisation can help you work out the best way to reduce absence.

[Find out more about recording sickness absence](#)

## Addressing the causes of absence

You might find there are certain issues that are causing higher levels of sickness absence.

For example, employees are:

- experiencing work-related stress
- struggling to balance work with caring responsibilities
- having breakdowns of relationships at work

You should try and address these underlying causes.

For example, you could:

- provide training for managers on supporting employees with work-related stress
- offer more ways of flexible working
- explore using mediation to resolve disagreements at work

Find out more about:

- [managing work-related stress](#)
- [flexible working](#)
- [mediation](#)

## Get more advice and support

If you have any questions about reducing absence, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).

Acas also provides:

- [tailored support for employers](#)
- [training on managing absence](#)
- [free webinars](#) – including on sickness absence