

Employment related FAQ's for Churches, Circuits and Districts Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This document provides information in response to a variety of employment related situations relating to coronavirus (COVID-19). The information is subject to change on a regular basis.

The Methodist Church, its governing body the Conference, the Methodist Council acting on behalf of the Conference, or any of the Connexional Team accept no responsibility for any loss arising out of reliance on the information contained herein.

Q. What are my duties as an employer?

A. Employers have a duty under health and safety legislation to take steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all their employees, so far as reasonably practicable, including those who are particularly at risk for any reason. Employees also have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of people they work with. They must cooperate with their employer to enable it to comply with its duties under health and safety legislation.

Q. What shall I do if one of my staff members/minister has called in sick and their symptoms include fever, coughing and difficulty breathing?

A. As the symptoms of the coronavirus infection (COVID-19) are present, however mild these might be, inform them that they need to stay at home, and that they should not leave their house for 7 days, as per the [official guidance](#), which includes further steps, which they would need to follow.

In addition, under current government guidance, staff members who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed should self-isolate and follow the [official guidance](#) and not leave the house for **14 days**. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

Q. Will employees be entitled to sick pay?

A. Employees will be entitled to sick pay in accordance with your sickness policies and procedures. As it is highly unlikely that fit-notes will be issued, in this circumstance, an exception will be made in terms of requesting a fit-note to cover the sickness absence.

The [Statutory Sick Pay \(General\) \(Coronavirus Amendment\) Regulations 2020 \(SI 2020/287\)](#) provides that employees (who qualify for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)) who are unable to work because they are self-isolating to prevent infection or contamination from coronavirus disease in accordance with government guidance are deemed to be incapable of work for the purposes of statutory sick pay (SSP).

The change to the rules on SSP are temporary in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and will expire eight months after the date they came into force.

For information about a range of extra support and measures put in place to help workers affected by Coronavirus please go to DWP website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-support-for-employees-benefit-claimants-and-businesses>

Q. What do we do if someone refuses to come in to work?

Some people are rightfully concerned about their health. If there's a heightened risk of catching the virus in your workplace, some employees may refuse to come in. If they do you should listen to their concerns and offer reassurance.

You should consider offering a temporary flexible working arrangement, including homeworking if possible. Or, you could allow them to take some time off as holiday or unpaid leave.

If there's a legitimate reason for not coming into the office (as outlined above) employees should stay at home.

Forcing an employee to come into work against their will, in these unprecedented circumstances, is likely to get messy fast, so try to be as considerate and flexible as possible.

Q. What shall I do if local school closures mean that a member of my team will disrupt their childcare arrangements?

A. Employees have a statutory right to a reasonable period of time off to care for dependants. This right applies where an employee needs to take time off work to take necessary action because of the unexpected disruption in arrangements for the care of a dependant such as a child. This right is limited to sufficient time off to deal with the immediate issues and to sort out longer-term arrangements if necessary. This leave is normally unpaid but please refer to any relevant policies in case paid emergency or special leave is payable to your employees.

Q. Caring for a dependent who becomes ill / with symptoms of the coronavirus

A. See response to the above question.

In addition, under current government guidance, staff members who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed should self-isolate and not leave the house for **14 days**. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

Q. Do we have to allow employees to work from home if a dependant needs care?

A. This is a possibility and will depend on individual circumstances. However, it may be that the staff member cannot do the work from home for some reason, including if they cannot work from home due to childcare (young children need constant supervision and an employee will not be able to do much work if they are caring for a small child). Older children might be able to entertain themselves with minimal oversight, in which case a

staff member could do some work from home whilst being there just in case anything occurred.

In this case, a little more flexibility might be helpful to the staff member, for example, to be able to log on slightly later in the day when they have sought alternative childcare arrangements. Please ensure that there are clear parameters set and that such flexibility does not jeopardise the staff member's health and wellbeing.

Annual leave or unpaid leave should also be considered where necessary.

Q. Do we have to let pregnant employees work from home if they request it? Should we require them to work from home?

A. Yes the current guidance is that they are at risk and may be particularly vulnerable.

There is a general duty to carry out a risk assessment and a workstation assessment for pregnant employees which must take into account current circumstances, and this risk assessment must be reviewed if the circumstances change. We should therefore conduct a risk assessment with each pregnant employee in light of Coronavirus, whether or not they have travelled to a high-risk location or have come into contact with someone who may be infected.

Q. If an employer's workplace is closed to prevent the spread of coronavirus, must it continue to pay employees?

A. If an employer decides to close the workplace, for example due to the numbers of staff off sick or self-isolating, or due to lack of customers, it must pay employees as normal unless the contract provides otherwise.

If employees can work from home while the workplace is closed, the employer should pay them as normal.

In workplaces where working from home is not an option, some employers may find themselves unable to keep up with their contractual obligations to pay employees. They may need to consider options such as asking for volunteers for redundancy or asking employees to agree to a period of annual leave and unpaid leave. Employees may be prepared to accept unpaid leave on a temporary basis, where the alternative would be redundancy.

If permanent closure or redundancies are an imminent threat, then you should act decisively and speak frankly to your staff now. Please liaise with your District Lay Employment Secretary for further advice and guidance.

Additional Resources:

[Download and print a handwashing guidance poster \(A4\)](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-covid-19>

<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>