**Coronavirus (COVID-19) HR Policy Frequently Asked Questions**

**Keep Wales safe:**

* [**get both jabs and when invited, get your booster**](https://gov.wales/get-your-covid-19-vaccination)
* **limit your contacts**
* **outdoors is safer than indoors**
* [**do a lateral flow test before seeing others**](https://gov.wales/get-rapid-lateral-flow-covid-19-tests-if-you-do-not-have-symptoms)
* **if you have symptoms,**[**self-isolate and book a PCR test**](https://gov.wales/get-tested-coronavirus-covid-19)
* [**wear a face covering**](https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-public)
* [**Read more about staying safe at Christmas**](https://gov.wales/staying-safe-christmas)**.**

**Updated: 5 January 2022**

These FAQs provide an enhanced and updated version of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) HR Policy Guidance.

This FAQ comes in two parts:

**Part A – General COVID FAQs**

Section 1 – Sickness Absence and Supporting Attendance

Section 2 –Travelling Abroad

Section 3 – Caring Responsibilities

Section 4 - Worktime and Leave – Special/Annual/Flexi

**Part B – Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

*For information on attending the workplace or working away from the office, please refer to the* [*SmartWorking FAQs*](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA35700768/document/versions/published)*.*

Working from home remains our default SmartWorking position. It is a **legal requirement that you should only attend an office where work cannot be done remotely or for wellbeing reasons.**If you are stopped by the police, show your Welsh Government pass and explain that you are attending for critical reasons.  ​​​​​​​

If you have to come into one of our buildings then please follow the public health and SmartWorking guidelines that are in place to protect you including our hygiene and social distancing arrangements. You should also consider the **‘flow before you go’** advice to take a lateral flow test before travelling to the office to help keep your colleagues safe. This good practice also applies when going out more generally and not just when attending work.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should self-isolate and take a PCR test as soon as possible. If you have tested positive for COVID-19 you must self-isolate and follow the guidance below.

You can leave self-isolation after 7 full days (on day 8 of your self-isolation period). You should take a lateral flow test (LFT) on day 6 of your self-isolation period and another lateral flow test 24 hours later. This is to check if you remain infectious and could pass COVID-19 on to others.

You should not take a LFT before the sixth day of your self-isolation period because the risks of remaining infectious and the chances of passing it on to others before this period is significantly higher.

If you are a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should follow this guidance. If you are not fully vaccinated, you are legally required to self-isolate as a close contact for 10 days.

If you are a close contact, self-isolation and what tests you should take will depend on

* your vaccination status
* your age
* your occupation

Anyone who develops a COVID-19 symptoms should **stay at home and self-isolate.** Self-isolation means not leaving your home because you have or might have COVID-19. You are legally required to self-isolate on notification of a positive test result. If you do not, you are committing an offence and could get a fixed penalty notice of up to £1,920 or be prosecuted in court, which can lead to an unlimited fine.

It is important that anyone who has or develops symptoms whilst self-isolating does not try to cope for too long on their own before getting medical help. You should contact NHS 111 Wales or your GP if you experience any of the following:

* symptoms that do not improve after 7 days
* breathlessness or vomiting at any time
* fatigue that stops you doing your normal daily activities
* babies or children under 5 who have a temperature at any time

If it is a medical emergency dial 999 and tell the call handler or operator that you or your relative have COVID-19 symptoms.

This document brings together the latest information available from Public Health Wales (PHW), along with the Welsh and UK Governments. Your wellbeing remains an absolute priority and we will continue to keep you informed through these FAQs, briefings, and staff emails.

Managers are reminded to be flexible and sensitive to individual circumstances in their conversations with colleagues who may be affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

***To quickly find what you’re looking for, press Ctrl F to bring up the navigation pane then type in the term you’re looking for.***

**The latest information and advice is available from:**

[The Welsh Government](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid19)

[Public Health Wales](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/)

[NHS Direct Wales Coronavirus (COVID-19) Symptom Checker](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/SelfAssessments/symptomcheckers/COVID19.aspx)

[UK Government](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response)

**PART A**

**GENERAL COVID FAQs**

*General support and guidance*

## **Section 1 – Sickness Absence and Supporting Attendance**

**1.1 When do I need to self-isolate?**

If you have any new symptoms of COVID-19, you should self-isolate and [**book a PCR test**](https://gov.wales/get-tested-coronavirus-covid-19) as soon as possible. This applies even if you have mild symptoms or if you have tested positive before.

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

* a high temperature
* a continuous cough
* loss or change of taste or smell

You should continue to isolate until you get the result of the test. If you have had a positive lateral flow test, you should isolate and book a PCR test as soon as possible.

### **If your test result is positive**

If the result is positive, you must self-isolate from the day your symptoms started and for at least 7 full days. If you test positive, your self-isolation period includes the day your symptoms started (or the day you had the test, if you do not have symptoms) and the next 7 full days. If you get symptoms while you're self-isolating, the 7 days restarts from the day after your symptoms started.

The NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect service will contact you to give you advice on self-isolation. They will need to find out who you have been in close contact with recently. Read more information about [**contact tracing**](https://gov.wales/contact-tracing-if-you-have-tested-positive).

You can leave self-isolation after 7 full days (on day 8 of your self-isolation period). On day 6 of your self-isolation period you should take a LFT and another test 24 hours later.

This is to check if you remain infectious and therefore could pass COVID-19 on to others. You should not take an LFT before the sixth day of your self-isolation period because the risks of remaining infectious and the chances of passing the virus on to others before this period is significantly higher.

If both your LFT test results are negative, it is likely that you were not infectious at the time the tests were taken. However, to further reduce the chance of passing COVID-19 on to others, if you leave self-isolation after 7 full days you are strongly advised to:

* not visit vulnerable people such as those in care homes or hospitals  and disclose your status if it is absolutely necessary to attend such places
* try and minimise contact with others and avoid crowded settings particularly indoor settings
* work from home if you are not already doing so
* pay extra attention to hand washing and wearing a face covering

You should follow this advice until 10 full days from when your self-isolation period started.

### **When should I remain in self-isolation?**

If either of the LFTs taken on day 6 or day 7 is positive, you should remain in self-isolation until 2 negative LFTs or day 10 whichever is sooner. A positive result indicates that you are likely to still be infectious and the risk of you passing on coronavirus to others is high. If the result of the LFT test you take on day 6 is positive, wait 24 hours before you take the next test.

If you still have a high temperature after 7 full days, even if the LFT is negative, you should continue to self-isolate until your temperature has returned to normal.

You do not need to continue self-isolating for more than 7 days if you only have a cough or loss of sense of smell or taste. These symptoms can last for several weeks following a COVID-19 infection.

### **If you do not have symptoms, but you test positive**

You may be advised to take a PCR or LFT if you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive. This could also be part of workplace arrangements.

If you have recently tested positive for COVID-19 (within the last 90 days) you should firstly take a LFT instead of a PCR. This is because there is a risk that a PCR test may detect residual traces of the virus leftover in your body.

If your test result is positive, you must self-isolate from the day of your test and for the next 7 days. As set out above, you should take LFTs on or after day 6 and 7 to check if you are still infectious before leaving self-isolation.

If your original positive result was from a LFT, you should also take a PCR test within 24 hours. This is important as it will allow genetic sequencing in a laboratory to identify any potential variants of concern.

## Close contacts

A close contact is anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19:

* face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a conversation within 1 metre
* skin-to-skin physical contact for any length of time
* contact within 1 metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact
* contact within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (as a one-off contact, or added up together over 1 day)
* travelled in the same vehicle or a plane

If you are a close contact, self-isolation and testing requirements will depend on:

* your vaccination status
* your age
* your occupation

You do not need to have received a booster vaccination to be considered fully vaccinated for the purpose of self-isolation rules.

### **Unvaccinated adults**

If you are 18 and over, and not fully vaccinated, you must self-isolate from the day you were last in contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 and for the next 10 days.

You should also take a PCR test on day 2 and day 8. It is important that you take the tests even if you feel well as you may have COVID-19 even if you do not have symptoms.

Even if these tests are negative, you should complete the isolation period. This is because if you have been infected, it can take time for symptoms to develop or to become infectious to others.

If you are not able to be vaccinated for a clinical reason, you must self-isolate for 10 days, even if you get a negative PCR or lateral flow test result.

You should also self-isolate if you have been advised to do so by your hospital / health care provider prior to undergoing surgery or some other medical procedure.

**You must discuss any need to self-isolate with your line manager as soon as reasonably practicable and not later than your next working day. This includes notifying your manager of the start and end dates of the isolation period.**

 **Fit for work while in self-isolation:**

The [Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Regulations](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2021/1453/made) have been temporarily changed to help release and maximise ‘General Practice’ capacity to manage the vaccine booster programme. Employees will be allowed to self-certificate for up to 28 days for absences starting on or after 10 December 2021 up to and including 26 January 2022.

The temporary changes are:

* For any sickness which began on or after 10 December 2021, up to and including 26 January 2022, the employee is able to self- certificate for the first 28 days of an absence.
* For any sickness absence which began before 10 December 2021, the employee can get a fit note after 7 days.

Throughout the pandemic, our guidance has said that managers should be sympathetic in situations where an employee has difficulty obtaining a Fit Note because of increased demands on the health service or where their GP is reluctant to provide one.  With this change, managers should continue to be flexible about what, if any, evidence of sickness absence is required and consider alternatives to fit notes wherever possible.

We will review the position on the 26 January, in accordance with the SSP provisions.  Currently, the self-certification period will revert to 7 days for any sickness absences which begin on or after 27 January 2022 and the advice below will apply:

If you need to self-isolate but are otherwise fit for work, you must complete the [COVID-19 Self-isolation form](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=xTbMooCS50qIh9Btq4kha1fwsHI89G1GrqDOknnVyuhUQjE5VE5NWk1RUFZUVEpETEc2QU9UV1ZUQyQlQCN0PWcu) [[1]](#footnote-1). If you are fit enough to work from home then you should do so, if this can be supported by the business. If your normal role cannot be undertaken at home, your manager should consider whether you can undertake alternative duties for the period of your self-isolation. If this cannot be supported, then paid special leave would apply.

**Sickness while in self-isolation:**

If you are too ill to work as a result of suspected or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19), you must notify your line manager who will record a sickness absence using the category ***Coronavirus (COVID-19) Symptoms*** or ***Coronavirus Confirmed (COVID-19)*** depending on your circumstances. If you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, then use the NHS 111 Wales online Coronavirus (COVID-19) service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111 Wales. For a medical emergency dial 999.

If you are absent through illness because you have acute symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19), this will **not** affect your trigger points. If you become ill because of some other (unrelated) reason, your line manager will record a normal sickness absence and this will be subject to trigger points in the usual way.

**1.2 When can I be tested?**

If you have coronavirus symptoms you need to take a test within the first 5 days of having symptoms as the test checks if you have coronavirus right now and not if you’ve already had the virus.

You can apply for a test for yourself or someone in your household with symptoms. This includes adults and children, including those under 5.

### **Book a test online**

[**Book a test online (on GOV.UK)**](https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test)

You will be asked to input your post code. The system will offer you appointments at the nearest testing sites with available slots.

If there are no tests available, try again later, as tests become available during the day.

**Book a test by telephone**

Call 119 between 7am and 11pm (calls are free).

If you have hearing or speech difficulties: call 18001119.

This service is available to help you book a test, but it cannot provide clinical advice.

It is available for support throughout the testing process. It offers support in up to 650 languages, including British Sign Language (BSL).

**Negative tests and returning to work**

If you are a fully vaccinated adult you do not need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact but you are strongly advised to:

* take a LFT every day for 7 days or until 10 days since your last contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 if this is earlier
* take this daily test before you leave the house for the first time that day
* upload all tests results on GOV.UK even if negative or void.

**1.3 If I am absent with coronavirus (COVID-19), do I need a GP certificate to confirm my absence?**

You can normally self-certify sickness absence for seven days or less but must cover week two onwards with a GP’s ‘Fit Note’. For now, we are not asking you to contact your GP for a ‘Fit Note’ when you are in the acute phase of the infection. If you are ill with either a high temperature or a new, continuous cough, your line manager will instead accept an extended self-certificate for the entire period of your self-isolation. Your manager will keep in touch with you for the duration of the absence.

**1.4 I have come to the end of my self-isolation period, but am still not well enough to work. What happens now?**

If you’ve completed self-isolation but are still unfit for work, this will be recorded as a new sickness absence, classified according to your main symptoms. If the initial assessment by your manager is that the new absence is as a direct result of the impact of the original infection, then a disregard of trigger points or consolidation of multiple short-term absences could be considered as a workplace adjustment as for other long term health conditions. This will be for your manager to determine based on your individual circumstances, potentially with advice from the HR Case Advisory team and / or Occupational Health.

 **1.5 As a manager, how should I deal with sickness absence following a coronavirus (COVID-19) infection?**

Absence during the acute phase of the infection (which will normally coincide with the period of self-isolation) should be recorded under the ***Coronavirus Confirmed (COVID-19)*** category and will be automatically exempt for trigger purposes. If your team member continues to feel unwell beyond the self-isolation period you should record a new sickness absence if they are unfit for work and categorise it according to the primary symptoms being displayed.

If the continued sickness absence is related to coronavirus (COVID-19) we expect you to view the case sympathetically and in line with the usual absence procedures. This could include a disregard of trigger points or consolidation of multiple short-term absences in the same way as for other long term health conditions or illnesses. It is essential that your team member does not receive any undue pressure from you to return to their full range of duties/hours until they are fully fit to do so. It is strongly recommended that OH referrals are undertaken early in suspected Long Covid cases, for example after the [self-isolation period](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nhs.uk%2Fconditions%2Fcoronavirus-covid-19%2Fself-isolation-and-treatment%2Fhow-long-to-self-isolate%2F&data=04%7C01%7CHelen.Robinson%40gov.wales%7Cd24f188c16754470a32408d8e85e63fc%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C637514839381552881%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=eN626UefLtUqbss4YJ5cVV%2BsxmXdM70dPF8leiLrBIs%3D&reserved=0). Where it has not been possible or appropriate to make an early referral, you must do so once the absence exceeds 28 days.

**1.6 I have recently had a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination and am experiencing some side effects. If I become unfit for work, will my sickness absence be exempt from the usual trigger points?**

If you are not fit to attend work as a result of any adverse side effects following vaccination, your absence should be recorded as a normal sickness absence according the main symptoms you have and will therefore not be exempt. However your line manager will treat such absences sympathetically so if you subsequently reach a trigger point as a result of the vaccination-related sickness absence, they will take this into consideration before any formal action is taken. For more information on possible vaccine side effects, please refer to the [Public Health Wales website](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-information/patient-information/).

**1.7 If I have an underlying health condition which means I’m at high risk of developing serious illness if I’m exposed to coronavirus (COVID-19), can I continue to work from home?**

Due to rigorous social distancing and other measures[[2]](#footnote-2) which help to minimise the risks of coronavirus transmission, our offices are considered to be very safe environments regardless of whether someone is at higher risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) complications. The WG’s offices are therefore likely to be much safer than other public settings such as supermarkets or hospitality venues, so if you visit these places in your personal life, you should not feel less safe when attending your usual workplace.

However if you are someone who was previously shielding[[3]](#footnote-3), you may have been advised to take additional precautions over and above the baseline measures in operation within the WG’s offices to keep yourself safe. This could include continuing to work from home unless it is business critical for you, personally, to attend one of the offices. We would expect your line manager to respect your wishes, if this can be supported by the business. If you are concerned about returning to the workplace you should complete an [Individual Risk Assessment](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA35472002/document/versions/published) to facilitate a conversation with your manager about any additional measures you need to stay safe.

The latest public health advice for former shielders living in Wales is available [here](https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html). Staff living outside Wales can find the latest guidance here.

 **1.8 My role cannot be done from home but I don’t feel safe working on-site or in the office. What are my options?**

The WG’s offices are generally considered to be very safe. However, if you are concerned about returning to the workplace, or have been advised to take additional precautions over and above the baseline safety measures already in place, you should complete an [Individual Risk Assessment](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA35472002/document/versions/published).

If your normal role cannot be done at home and your Risk Assessment indicates you are at higher risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), then your line manager could consider whether there are alternative duties that you could undertake at home while case rates are high. If alternative duties are not available or your home environment does not support homeworking, your line manager could authorise a period of paid special leave.

If your Risk Assessment does not indicate any specific coronavirus (COVID-19) risk factors and there are no alternative duties you could undertake at home, your options include taking time off work via annual leave or accrued flexi-credit or applying for unpaid special leave (up to 3 months) or a career break.

**1.9 Can I offer a flexi credit to an employee who has been offered a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination during the working day?**

Yes. We recognise it may not be possible for employees to organise these appointments outside normal working hours. Line managers should support national vaccination efforts by offering an appropriate flexi credit in line with the rules on medical/dental appointments set out in the [Attendance Management Policy](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA626416/document/versions/published).

## **2 – Travelling Abroad**

**2.1 I have asked my manager for one week’s annual leave to cover a week’s holiday abroad to a country or territory that still has travel restrictions and no travel corridor is in place. Must I take annual leave to cover the quarantine (self-isolation) period also? Can my request for annual leave be refused?**

In deciding whether to allow annual leave, the manager can take account of the impact of annual leave and absence due to quarantine on business delivery. If the impact cannot be supported managers can refuse annual leave in accordance with the department’s annual leave policy. At the earliest opportunity before taking leave employees and managers should consider whether the employee can work from home during the quarantine period, and what steps might be needed to make this possible.

Employees can discuss with their managers all practical options to cover the quarantine period, including working from home where possible. Only where this is not possible, should other options to cover the period be considered. This may include temporary changes to working patterns, or finding non-operational work which can be completed at home rather than in the office, before using annual or flexi leave or agreeing special leave without pay. Employees are expected to follow FCO advice and guidance on [travelling abroad](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and check the latest [Welsh Government quarantine advice](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) for the country being visited.

**2.2 An employee is travelling abroad to a country or territory that still has travel restrictions and no travel corridor is in place for compassionate reasons. They will need to serve a quarantine (self-isolation) period overseas and again when they return to the UK. How do I treat the periods of quarantine?**

If you agree that there are compassionate reasons for travel, you should apply the same approach to both periods of quarantine as each is outside of the employee’s control.

You should explore options for working during the quarantine period with your team member. Whilst this is more difficult to arrange overseas due to IT and security issues, there may still be research and L&D opportunities that can be pursued using publicly available material. If it is not possible to work during the quarantine periods you can allow special leave with pay.

**2.3 Whilst on holiday to a country covered by a coronavirus (**[**COVID-19) ‘travel corridor’**](https://gov.wales/exemptions-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19-html) **exemption, there is a change in FCDO advice and the UK quarantine rules which means my employee will now have to quarantine (self-isolate) on entering the UK. What should I do?**

Employees are expected to follow FCDO advice and guidance on [travelling abroad](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and check the latest [Welsh Government quarantine advice](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) for the country being visited. If they are unable to work from home on return, managers, in discussion with their employee, should explore all practical options including temporary changes to working patterns, or finding non-operational work that the employee can complete at home rather than in the office. Only where this is not possible, should managers look at options to cover the period, through special leave with pay.

**2.4 Whilst abroad, there is a change in the foreign country’s situation and my employee is unable to return to the UK. Can I grant special leave while they are trapped abroad?**

Employees are expected to follow FCDO advice and guidance on [travelling abroad](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) and check the latest [Welsh Government quarantine advice](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) for the country being visited. Whilst trapped abroad the employee may receive special leave with pay as this situation is outside their control. On return to the UK, they may also have to quarantine (self-isolate), but you should check the Welsh Government guidance on the [exemptions where quarantine does not apply](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19).

Following the employee’s return to the UK, if they are required to quarantine on [entering to the UK](https://gov.wales/travellers-exempt-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19) and they are unable to work from home, managers, in discussion with their employee, should explore all practical options including temporary changes to working patterns, or finding non-operational work that the employee can complete at home rather than in the office. Only where this is not possible, should managers look at options to cover the period, through using annual or flexi leave, or agree special leave with/without pay depending on individual circumstances.

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## **Section 3 – Caring Responsibilities**

**3.1 I live with or have caring responsibilities for someone who has or who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). What should I do?**

Please follow the latest [public health advice](https://gov.wales/self-isolation-stay-home-guidance-households-possible-coronavirus).

**3.2 What should I do if I live with someone who is clinically more vulnerable to developing serious illness if exposed to coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

You should follow the latest public health advice. The WG’s offices are considered to be very safe due to rigorous social distancing and other measures that help to minimise the risk of coronavirus transmission, but if your role can be done at home and it is not business critical for you, personally, to attend the office, you may prefer to work from home while coronavirus (COVID-19) rates are high. Where possible, your line manager should support you in this.

**3.3 I need to accompany my dependant to a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination appointment during working hours. Do I qualify for a flexi-credit to cover my absence?**

Yes. Normally you would be expected to use annual / flexi leave or SmartWorking to cover lost working time as a result of accompanying a dependent to a medical appointment, but in order to support the national vaccination programme, your line manager can offer you an appropriate flexi credit in line with the rules on medical/dental appointments set out in the Attendance Management Policy.

 **3.4 I do not want my child / children to return to school during the pandemic so will be home schooling them instead. This means I will be unable to work. What options are available to me?**

The expectation is that children will take up school or care places where these are available. If you choose to keep your child at home and cannot work as a consequence, your options include taking annual or flexi leave, unpaid special leave (up to 3 months) or a career break.

 **3.5 What if I have an issue with School, Early Years provision and childcare?**

If your ability to work is impacted by circumstances arising directly from coronavirus (COVID-19) and therefore beyond your control, your line manager should consider all flexibilities including topping up flexi credits where a full day cannot be worked (over 4 week reporting period) and the use of paid special leave. This may include when a dependent is self-isolating and unable to attend a pre-arranged holiday club/care or because the holiday care is unavailable due to coronavirus (COVID-19). Flexi top-ups or paid special leave will apply where other options including working from home, working from a different workplace, working different attendance patterns/more flexibly or redeploying to a suitable alternative role cannot reasonably be achieved.

**3.6 What happens if my child has symptoms that may indicate a coronavirus (COVID-19) infection and is self-isolating e.g. while awaiting test results?**

If you are fit for work, your role can be done from home and you are able to adapt your working pattern to care for your child, your line manager should support you in this, applying an appropriate flexi-credit if a full day is not achievable. If it’s not possible to identify ways of balancing work and childcare, your manager may grant special leave with pay during the isolation period. You are expected to act responsibly, and if you had already booked annual leave or flexi leave at this time, you must not cancel this leave and apply for special leave instead.

**3.7 My child’s wrap-around childcare (e.g. breakfast club or after school club) has been disrupted due to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions and I will struggle to start/finish work at my normal time. What should I do?**

You should discuss your situation with your line manager. As the flexi bandwidth now allows hours to be worked at any time between 6am and 8pm on weekdays we expect your line manager to be sympathetic to the situation and allow you to vary your usual start/finish times, making up any shortfall in hours at other times.

**3.8 I have limited child-care options during the school holidays because of the pandemic. Is there any support available?**

If you would normally use some annual leave or flexi leave at this time, you should continue to do so. On days when you are not taking leave, you should try to arrange alternative child-care to allow you to work all or part of your contracted hours. You and your manager can also agree some flexible working options that would better enable you to balance work and childcare and minimise any shortfall in your working hours. If these options have been explored, your manager may offset any remaining shortfall in working hours with a flexi credit or paid special leave as appropriate. Each case will be considered sensitively and on its own merits.

 **3.9 I am returning from parental leave and cannot find enough child-care to support a full-time working pattern. What are my options?**

We offer a number of family-friendly working options to help you to balance work and caring commitments. Please see the [Working Flexibly](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Working-Flexibly-Working-Hours-Work-Patterns.aspx) intranet page for more information.

**3.10 What about other caring responsibilities?**

You should talk about your caring responsibilities with their manager as part of your individual SmartWorking charter.

Managers should be sympathetic and supportive and recognise that employees with caring responsibilities may continue to need additional support when considering SmartWorking and returning to the workplace. Every caring scenario is different and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will have impacted individuals differently. Managers will need to discuss what the transition back to the workplace means with each carer on an individual basis to enable carers to make appropriate provision. You and your manager need to work together, be reasonable, stay in touch, keep arrangements under review and monitor wellbeing. If you are temporarily unable to fulfill your contracted hours, your line manager can approve some paid special leave or a flexi credit as appropriate. You should also keep abreast of any changes to [Welsh Government advice and guidance](https://gov.wales/education-coronavirus) which may impact on your circumstances.

## **4 – Worktime and Leave – Special/Annual/Flexi**

**4.1** **I’m working longer hours as a result of the WG response to coronavirus (COVID-19) and I may struggle to take additional flexi leave. What can I do?**

The temporary coronavirus (COVID-19) working arrangements set out in the [Overtime Policy](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA654141/document/versions/published) apply to **all** staff – whether part-time or full-time. This means that over a 4-week flexi period, part-time staff will need to have worked the same number of hours as full-time staff in order to start claiming hours as overtime. The ‘threshold’ for claims (for both F/T and P/T staff) is **185 hours** i.e. standard conditioned hours over the 4 week period (148 hours) plus 37 additional ‘flexi’ hours (= 185 hours).

* Any overtime payable is calculated at the end of each 4 week flexi accounting period;
* Additional hours worked over and above conditioned hours (whatever the working pattern) should be logged as usual on the flexi-sheet;
* At the end of each 4-week accounting period, staff who have accumulated more than 185 hours will be able to claim those additional hours as paid overtime;
* Claims should be made via the [standard overtime claim form](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Allowances-Overtime-and-Traveltime.aspx) at the end of each 4-week accounting period;
* The claim form should state that the overtime claim relates to coronavirus (COVID-19).
* Anyone claiming overtime will begin the next accounting period with 37 hours flexi-credit.

There is an exception to the ‘threshold’ in relation to hours worked at weekends and on public/privilege holidays which both attract an overtime payment premium (i.e. double-time for Sundays and public/privilege days; time-and-a-half for Saturday working).

Staff who are asked to work at weekends or on public/privilege holidays as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) (note this does need to be at management request and not of their own choosing), **do not** need to have reached the ‘threshold’ set out above in order to submit a premium payment claim. We are therefore advising staff who need to submit such claims to do so separately.

Anyone claiming an overtime payment **cannot** at the same time record these hours on their flexi-sheet as this would effectively be double-counting the hours worked.

**To note:**

As the overtime is as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19), claims can only be made for the 4 week periods from March 9th 2020. Any credit or debit accumulated prior to 9th March 2020 should be frozen for time being. Those with a deficit going into March 9th 2020 will of course have had the opportunity to offset that against any credit since then **if they wished**. They may, however be in a position where they are working sufficient hours to claim overtime during this period. Guidance on completing the form is available here:

[https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id:A29924318/document/versions/published](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29924318/document/versions/published)

**4.2 Excess flexi payment for employees (outside the SCS)**

Where you accumulate more than 37 hours flexi in a 4 week reporting period, you may claim an excess flexi payment. This temporary amendment is to take account of the variable work patterns some employees undertake week on week to manage work and caring responsibilities. Overtime cannot be claimed for the same period. You also qualify for any premium payments, related to the requirement to work at weekends or on public or privilege holidays.

Full guidance on Overtime can be found [here](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Allowances-Overtime-and-Traveltime.aspx)

**4.3 Should I be taking annual leave at this time?**

It’s important to feel able to take annual leave at this time, even if you are unable to go on holiday, as it is the main way that you can step away from the work, recharge your batteries and protect your wellbeing for the future.

Line managers are encouraged to allow requests for annual leave if possible, and act flexibly to resource remaining work.

**4.4 My employee has annual leave agreed but they are not able to go on their planned holiday due to coronavirus (COVID-19). Can they cancel their annual leave?**

Employees should be encouraged to take their annual leave to help make sure they take appropriate rest from work during the year.

You should allow employees to cancel annual leave if this supports business need, e.g. due to large number of employees not able to work.

Employees should be reminded that future annual leave requests will be handled in line with the usual procedures, e.g. business needs, requests from others, etc

**4.5 Am I allowed to carry over additional Annual Leave if I’ve not been able to take it because of coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

We have personal responsibility to look after our own wellbeing so that we can be strong and resilient for others. Annual leave is a key part of this. Making sure that you and your colleagues can perform at their best is the best way to support and ease the burden on everyone at this time.

You should apply for leave in the normal way but if your manager is unable to approve it they will note, where appropriate, that the reason is related to coronavirus. This will allow you to carry forward the leave as part of the flexibilities for carrying forward annual leave.

At present, the Welsh Government is allowing full time staff to carry over 24 days and/or bank 10 days (pro-rated for part time staff). Those with banked leave also have an additional year in which to take that leave. The carry-over arrangements apply from the first leave year impacted by coronavirus (COVID-19) and staff are expected to manage their excess leave down to normal levels within the next 2 leave years. For most staff this means that excess leave should have been used by the end of the 2022 annual leave cycle. In exceptional circumstances where this is not suitable, payment for excess leave may be made following an approved business case to the HR Director.

When using the new flexibilities on carrying forward leave managers should work together with employees to achieve a balance between supporting annual leave to meet employee plans and continuing to deliver the business.

Line managers can ask you to cancel or postpone annual leave (or flexi leave) if it is necessary to deliver business. However, they must give the appropriate notice, for example, one week’s notice for one week’s leave (annual leave only). Line managers may also agree exceptionally to employees carrying over or being paid for leave you were unable to take by the end of their leave year with the approval of HR Director.

**PART B**

**Health, Safety and Wellbeing during COVID**

Support and guidance for you, your team and at home

**1 Wellbeing**

**1.1 How do I stay physically fit working from home?**

Follow the advice in the [Effective Working from Home - Your guide to working in isolation](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29355542/document/versions/published) handbook on working conditions – e.g. lighting, seating, posture and taking regular breaks. Ensure that you are not working excessive hours and take regular breaks from your screen to protect your eyes. Use the 20/20/20 rule: look away from your screen every 20 minutes, at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

Take a look at this [Staying Active](https://gov.wales/safe-help/staying-active) advice and tips on the Welsh Government website and try these [Desk stretches.](https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/desk-stretches) You can also get active at the Welsh Government [virtual gym.](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-Local-News/SitePages/Get-exercising-at-the-Welsh-Government-virtual-gym.aspx)

Remember to use your [Wellbeing Hour](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA20891726/document/versions/published). Try to do something which takes you away from a screen and enables you to have some fresh air and move around. This can be used for your outdoor exercise (in accordance with the [social distancing guidance](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-social-distancing-guidance) or for exercising, yoga or mindfulness within the home. Alternatively, try some of these [10 free fitness apps](https://brightside.me/inspiration-health/ten-awesome-free-apps-for-working-out-at-home-143455/) for working out at home.

The DSE Assessment [Healthy Working](https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/search?query=healthy%20working&strict=false&popupUri=%2FResource%2F8e594506-4b08-4d4e-814f-ca90d1e82364) includes a home working module and it may be a good idea to familiarise yourself with this as soon as possible:

Cardinus have set up a new [Health and Safety Hub](https://www.cardinus.com/covid-19-health-safety-hub/#HOMEWORKING) on safe working when you are homeworking temporarily.

**1.2 How do I look after my own and my dependants’ mental health?**

**Keep in touch** with family, friends and colleagues remotely – whether by phone, Skype, FaceTime, email etc. A virtual lunch or coffee break is conducive to good mental health.

**Take time out for yourself.** If you are going to be in your home for an extended period, it is important you plan breaks in your working day and organise activities you’re interested in at night. It might be the chance to work through your personal to-do list or take up a new hobby.

It is important during this time that you continue to book and use annual leave as you would normally to avoid burnout. Discuss with your manager about how this will work in your team.

Spend time doing things that you enjoy – this might include reading, [cooking](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/), or listening to/watching favourite [radio](https://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts) or TV programmes.

The following websites have a wealth of resources on mental health help:

* [**Charity for Civil Servants**](https://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/) offer a range of facilities support and free prize draws! – well worth a look!
* Welsh Government’s [Stress and Mental Wellbeing](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/Stress-and-Mental-Wellbeing.aspx) intranet pages
* Contact Mind Matters. They have a wealth of resources and advice. Sign up to their mailing list at mindmatters@gov.wales and visit their intranet page [here](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-About-Us/SitePages/Mind-Matters.aspx)
* Access our [**EAP**](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/You-and-Your-Wellbeing.aspx)
* [**The Samaritans**](https://www.samaritans.org/wales/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/) have information on their website: and their 24/7 helpline is **116 123.**
* [**Mind**](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/)  Helpline number is **0300 123 3393**
* [**Childline**](https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/message-from-childline/)Counsellors are available via the online chat on the website. Their helpline number is **0800 1111**.
* [**AnxietyUK**](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/) have resources on their website and a helpline open 10:00 – 20:00 - **03444 775775**
* Civil Service Local has developed a handy [A-Z to Better Wellbeing toolkit](https://civilservicelocal.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/94/2018/11/A-Z-to-Better-Wellbeing-toolkit.pdf)

Visit the [**Learning lab**](https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/workspaces) to watch some TED talks and see our health and wellbeing courses. You can find a regularly updated selection of Sites and Resources to Support Wellbeing during Covid-19 as well as other useful resources linked under Mind Matters. Courses include resilience and wellbeing, stress, mindfulness, mental health at work and mental wellbeing.

**1.3 What if I have domestic issues that make it difficult to work from home?**

For those experiencing domestic abuse, measures to curb the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) such as self-isolating and mandatory lock downs could trap you in your home, isolated from the people and the resources that could help you. It may be necessary for you to work from home over a long period of time. You may also have children who are at home from school who need to be protected.

The Welsh Government is fully aware of the implications of the current situation for you, as well as the continued need for unobtrusive contact and confidentiality when you access support.

When you are working from home, you may wish to call, email or text your line manager, [Case Advisory Team](https://wales365uk.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet-HR-Recruitment-Vacancies/SitePages/HR-Case-Advisory-team.aspx), HR Business Partner or TUS for support options including special leave. The Employee Assistance Programme is available to all employees. Please call 0800 174 319 or [www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk](http://www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk). (Username – welsh, Password – government)

**1.4 Where can I turn if I am the victim of domestic abuse?**

The Welsh Government’s Live Fear Free helpline is available on **0808 80 10 800**; Text service: 078600 77333; or [www.gov.wales/live-fear-free](http://www.gov.wales/live-fear-free), and provides easy to access, helpful confidential advice on a variety of matters which may be relevant to your situation. It is open 24/7.

**If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police - the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.**

**If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and then press 55. This will transfer your call to the relevant police force who will assist you without you having to speak.**

The UK Government’s advice is that you are able to leave your home if you are in danger from domestic abuse and looking for refuge. The UK Government advice and organisations that can help can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse)

Specific advice in relation to coronavirus has also been issued by [Women’s Aid](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/).

**1.5 Where can I find support and information for older people?**

* [Older Peoples' Commissioner](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/coronavirus.aspx)
* [Age UK](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/information-advice/health-wellbeing/coronavirus/) They also offer a ‘[check in and chat service](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/information-advice/age-cymru-advice/check-in-and-chat/)’ for people over 70.
* [The Silver Line](https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/) is the only free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Telephone 0800 4 70 80 90.

**1.6 Where can I find support and information on coronavirus for carers?**

Carers should follow the latest WG [public health advice](https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html).

If you have any questions about what help is available in your area, please contact your local authority.

The following websites may also offer support:

[Carers UK](https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19)

[Carers Trust](https://carers.org/guidance-on-coronavirus/-guidance-coronavirus)

**1.7 Where can I find support and information on coronavirus (COVID-19) for disabled people?**

[Disability Wales](http://www.disabilitywales.org/coronavirus-questions-answered/)

[Learning Disability Wales](https://www.ldw.org.uk/project/coronavirus/)

**1.8 How can I keep my children occupied if they have to stay at home as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

In addition to work being provided by your school, there are plenty of ways to keep your children busy.

There is a new network in the [Learning Lab](https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/workspaces) to share resources for children’s learning and family activities while we’re asked to stay at home.

You can leave home without actually leaving the couch, from virtual zoo exhibits to museum gallery tours [here](https://www.insider.com/museums-theme-parks-offer-virtual-tours-ideal-for-social-distancing-2020-3) and [here](https://www.msn.com/en-us/travel/travel-trivia/stuck-at-home-these-12-famous-museums-offer-virtual-tours-you-can-take-on-your-couch-video/ar-BB119nm6).

Take a look at the activities and resources at the [BBC](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize), [National Geographic](https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/) and [Futurelearn](https://www.futurelearn.com/). Or start learning a new language with [Duolingo](https://www.duolingo.com/).

**1.9 How do I talk to my children about coronavirus (COVID19)?**

Take a look at the resources below if you want advice on talking to your children about coronavirus (COVID19):

[BBC](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51734855)

[British Psychological Society](https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/advice-talking-children-about-illness)

[PHW Easy Read Information on COVID19](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-resources/easy-read-resources/)

**Financial Wellbeing**

**1.10 Where can I find help on rent/mortgage payments and housing?**

Welsh Government [Guidance for tenants in the private rented sector](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-tenants-in-the-private-rented-sector-html). Tenants are currently entitled to at least [three months’ notice](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-tenants-in-the-private-rented-sector-html#section-39094) if their landlord wishes to evict them.

Answers to some frequently asked questions are on the [UK Finance](https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/press/press-releases/uk-finance-responds-statement-chancellor-regarding-support-mortgage-customers) website.

[FCA Mortgage Coronavirus Info for consumers](https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/mortgages-coronavirus-consumers)

Welsh Government [Help to buy loan interest repayment holiday](https://gov.wales/housing-minister-confirms-help-buy-wales-loan-interest-repayment-holiday)

Shelter Cymru [Coronavirus advice](https://sheltercymru.org.uk/get-advice/coronavirus/) and can provide housing related advice by phone on **08000 495 495**.

**1.11 What if I/family members have financial worries?**

If a member of your household or family is self-employed and has lost income due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) they should visit [Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance and support - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) for details of the support available. Welsh Government is also providing financial support through Business Wales. Visit <https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice> for further information.

The following organisations also offer financial advice and resources:

* [Charity for Civil Servants](https://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/)
* [Citizen Advice](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/)
* [Money and Pensions Service - Coronavirus Financial Advice](https://mailchi.mp/maps.org.uk/news-from-the-money-and-pensions-service-january-2824249?e=ce548efa9d)
* You can also contact [Money Advice Services](https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/search?query=whatsapp) to receive free independent advice using live chat, WhatsApp or by phone.
* [National Debt Line](https://www.nationaldebtline.org/)
* [Step Change](https://www.stepchange.org/)
* [Money Saving Expert](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/)

**1.12 How can I protect myself / others from fake news and scams?**

Fake news is not new, but as concern about the coronavirus (COVID-19) mounts, falsified reports have flooded social media. The UK Government’s SHARE checklist will help you to spot fake news:

* Source - make sure information comes from a trusted source
* Headline - always read beyond the headline
* Analyse - check the facts
* Retouched - does the image or video look as though it has been doctored?
* Error - look out for bad grammar and spelling

There are a number of scams circulating through various media including ransomware, credential theft, bitcoin or fraud. Some are online shopping scams where products never arrive or a fake link to information contains malware which steals information from infected devices. There have also been reports of doorstep crime and telephone scams.

If you spot any fake news or scams you can report them to the platform you found the post on or [Action Fraud](https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/) / 0300 123 2040.

Further information on types of scams and what to look out for can be found in our [Security Bulletin Special Issue](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA29591331/document/versions/published).

**1.13 Where can I find local information about coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

Your local authority website is the best source of information on local containment measures. Here is a list of [Local Authorities](https://www.wlga.wales/welsh-local-authority-links)

1. The form only needs to be completed if you have symptoms of or have tested positive for COVID or you have been asked to self-isolate by TTP following close contact with a positive case. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more information on health & safety measures in place within our offices, please refer to the [SmartWorking FAQs](https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id%3AA35700768/document/versions/published). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shielding is a measure to protect people who are clinically considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus by minimising all interaction between them and others to reduce the risk of infection. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)