When staff call in sick

Your response when a staff member calls in sick can make a big difference to how they feel about their work.

Communicate your reporting practices

A clear, well-communicated reporting procedure for when a member of staff calls in sick will help to ensure you get the information you need to keep the service running and tackle any future problems. Making staff aware of the reporting procedure will help to avoid any misunderstandings.

As a manager you will need to know the reporting procedure and who is responsible for reporting and referrals. You should also make sure you know where to find the numbers and referral procedures for occupational health, counselling or rapid access services.

> [Top tip] You may wish to discuss the reporting procedure at a staff briefing so that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to how it works. This will also reinforce the message that absence reporting is about looking after staff wellbeing and ensuring the team is supported.

Consistently gather key information

Always ask your staff the following questions:

- What's the reason for the absence?
- How long do you think you're likely to be off?
- Is there any work you've been doing that needs to be picked up while you're off?

Your organisation's sickness absence policy may have suggested questions that you should ask.

Depending on the reason they give, you may also want to find out:

- Are there any adjustments that you could make that would enable to employee to come to work?
- If the illness is infectious, is there a specific period of time that they need to remain off work once they are symptom free?
- If the reason for absence is musculoskeletal, could you refer them to a rapid access service (if you have this available)?
- If the reason for absence is related to a mental health issue, could you refer them to a counselling service (if you have this available)?
- If they are fit to work but physically unable to come in, is there another area they can work in or could they work from home?

It is your responsibility to maintain records of sickness absences, including conversations with staff while they are off sick and any meetings you have following those absences.

[Top tip] If you notice an error in recording make sure you raise it so it can be corrected.

Over time, accurate records will enable you to spot any patterns of absence or themes within the reasons for absence. This will allow you to have a balanced, fact-based conversation with staff about any worrying trends. It may even help you to facilitate early intervention to prevent bigger problems, for example physiotherapy for a bad back.

Listen and support

Listening at this stage is key. This seems obvious but when you are busy the importance of listening can sometimes be forgotten. If this was you ringing in sick, how would you feel and what would you want your manager to say?

It may be that all you need to do is to listen, wish them well and agree either when they will be back or when you will next be in touch. Listening carefully, reserving judgement and allowing staff the time to discuss things further if needed will ensure they feel fully supported.

Keep in contact

If your employee is going to be off for more than a day you will need to discuss how often you will keep in touch and who will contact who. Knowing when you'll next be in touch will reassure them and enable you to:

- review whether you can do anything within the organisation to support them

- plan how to cover their workload and keep the service running

- discuss dates and options for your staff member's return to work.

Consider reasonable adjustments

Usually staff will be able to return to their role and work environment. However, you may need to ask if any adjustments could be made to allow them to return to work and/or prevent further absences. The sooner you have this conversation, the more time you will have to arrange for the support, equipment or adjustments needed. Making adjustments could also mean your staff member could return to work sooner.