

Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Guidelines to Circuits and Societies as Employers

The current outbreak of Coronavirus is raising concern for many and not least for the Methodist Church in Ireland as an employer.

As an Employer you can find advice on preventing the spread of the infection at

Northern Ireland

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

Republic of Ireland

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

This includes both general advice on preventing the spread of the infection, and specific advice relevant to the workplace should that become necessary.

Can an employer instruct an employee who may be at risk of having contracted coronavirus not to come to work?

Employers are under a duty to ensure the health and safety of **all** their employees and to provide a safe place and system of work. In light of this, and the serious implications if the coronavirus (COVID-19) is contracted and spread in the workplace, an employer would be justified in instructing an employee with the symptoms associated with the coronavirus not to attend work, to seek advice from NHS 111 or 112 in ROI and not return to work until the symptoms have cleared.

If an employee is not sick but their employer instructs them not to come to work, they should be paid their normal salary.

If an employee needs time off work to look after someone

Employees are entitled to time off work to help someone who depends on them (a 'dependant') in an unexpected event or emergency. This would apply to situations connected with coronavirus. For example:

- if they have children they need to look after or arrange childcare for because their school has closed
- to help their child or another dependant if they're sick, or need to go into isolation or hospital

Whilst there is no statutory right to pay for this time off, you might offer pay depending on the contract of employment. However, the amount of time an employee takes off to look

after someone must be reasonable for the situation. For example, they might take 2 days off to start with, and if more time is needed, they could book annual leave.

Employee who is not actually sick but is unable to come to work under advice to self-isolate

Employees must inform their employer as soon as possible if they cannot work. They should tell their employer the reason and how long they are likely to be off. In the event of self-isolation, where it is possible to work from home, or to take annual leave, these options should be explored in consultation with your employee. Where neither is possible, it is advisable to pay a **minimum** of statutory sick pay. However, if you offer contractual sick pay it is good practice to pay this. Not to do so could risk the person returning to work because they need to be paid and consequentially the possibility arises that the virus is spread. Please also note that you may need to be flexible with regards to the employee providing “Unfit For Work” notes if they have been told to self-isolate.

Employees who do not want to come to work

Some employees who have no reason under current advice to stay away from work may nevertheless want to remain away for fear of catching the virus. Employers are advised to deal with these concerns sensitively and offer the possibility of working from home or taking paid or unpaid leave where possible. This is particularly advisable when the employer is dealing with vulnerable employees, i.e. those at high risk of developing more severe symptoms from the coronavirus, such as employees with asthma, diabetes or heart disease.