



Churches Together in South Tyneside

Sickness Absence Policy

ISSUE	1	2	3
DATE			

Policy and/or Procedure adopted by on:

Policy and/or Procedure Review date:

Signed:

Name:
Position:

AMENDMENT RECORD

Page No.	Amendment No.	Reason For Change	Issued by	Date of Amendment

Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure

Introduction

Churches Together in South Tyneside (CTST) aims to minimise the disruption caused by absence and secure the attendance of all employees by setting clear guidelines on absence notification, encouraging regular communication between employees and their Leads and assisting Leads and Trustees to handle absences in a fair and consistent way.

We are sympathetic to genuine cases of illness or injury which might make absence unavoidable. However, excessive or unauthorised absence causes disruption to CTST, lowers morale of colleagues and makes us less able to accommodate genuine cases of long-term illness. Therefore, all absences are treated seriously, and excessive or unnecessary absence is likely to lead to informal or formal action under our Disciplinary Procedures.

This policy and procedure is not contractual but sets out the way in which CTST will manage absences from work. We reserve the right to vary, replace or terminate it at any time.

Scope

This policy and procedure applies to all employees.

Time off for medical and dental appointments

Normally, appointments are expected to be outside of working hours and in your own time. However, sympathetic consideration will be given in exceptional circumstances such as emergencies. Subject to prior agreement with your Project/Executive Lead, reasonable time off to attend doctor, dentist or medical appointments will be authorised. Such time off **will** normally be paid.

We request that you give us as much notice as possible of such appointments, particularly when these are for routine checks. Failure to give reasonable notice when this is possible may result in disciplinary action, or the absence being regarded as unauthorised, and therefore regarded as unpaid, leave. We reserve the right to ask employees to reschedule a routine appointment if its timing causes disruption to the service delivery or organisation.

Please note that different rules apply to time off for ante-natal appointments.

Absence Notification

Your Lead should be your main point of continuity and contact when phoning in sick. If you are unable to attend work, you must notify your Project/Executive Lead by telephone, at the earliest opportunity and no later than 10.00 am (or one hour before your scheduled start time) on the first day of absence. We normally require you to make personal contact with us; in exceptional circumstances if you are unable to

notify us personally you can ask a relative, friend or neighbour to contact us on your behalf.

If you have attended work but are unable to remain due to your illness or injury you should inform your Project/Executive Lead before leaving work. If you are unable to return to work on your next working day you should follow our notification procedure.

It is essential that you comply with our notification requirements so that we can make arrangements to cover your duties and responsibilities, thus minimising the disruption to our service delivery and maintaining a reasonable workload for your colleagues.

You will be required to provide us with information about the reason for your absence and an indication of its likely duration. The reason for your absence will be kept confidential from your colleagues if you request this.

It is then your responsibility to keep us informed of your situation on a regular basis; should you be away from home at any time during your absence, you are to provide us with alternative contact details. You may be contacted by us during your absence, and in addition we may visit you at home to discuss your health and progress towards returning to work.

Whilst absent from work due to illness or injury, you must not take on any other work, either paid or unpaid, without our consent, irrespective of whether you are still receiving sick pay. You remain our employee and are bound by all of the terms and conditions of your employment.

Failure to comply with our notification procedures could affect your entitlement to sick pay, and could result in disciplinary action being taken.

Absence Certification

You are required to provide self-certification/medical certificates as follows;

- If you are absent for seven calendar days or less, you will be required to complete a self certification form on your return to work (Appendix 1).

If you are absent for more than seven calendar days, you must obtain a Statement of Fitness for Work ("fit note") and forward it to your Project/Executive Lead. Fit notes can be issued by nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists and physiotherapists as well as doctors. Fit notes can be issued digitally with the name of the doctor or other healthcare professional authorising the form or be handwritten. The note must include the issuer's name and profession and the address of the medical practice.

- If a period of medically certified absence is extended by a further fit note, you must inform your Lead on the same day and advise us of the extension of the absence. Fit notes should be sent to us on a regular basis until you are able to return to work.

- When you return to work after absence, you will be required to complete a self-certification of absence form. Your Project/Executive Lead will discuss the details with you and will counter-sign the form, provided the information that you have supplied is satisfactory. This form will then be retained on your personnel file, and a copy provided for payroll purposes if there are payment implications.

If you do not comply with the above it could affect your entitlement to sick pay and, in some instances, could warrant disciplinary action.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

All employees are entitled to SSP, payable for up to 28 weeks, provided they meet the detailed requirements of the scheme. SSP is paid from the fourth qualifying day in a 'period of incapacity for work' (PIW). The first three qualifying days are known as 'waiting days', and there is no entitlement to SSP for these days. The Government fixes the rate of SSP, which is normally reviewed annually.

To qualify for SSP you must:

- be classed as an employee and have done some work for us under your contract of employment
- have been ill for at least four days in a row (including non-working days)
- earn at least the lower earnings limit for National Insurance contributions, and
- have followed the absence notification procedure outlined above.

You will not qualify if you:

- were not entitled to SSP the last time you were sick, and this spell of sickness links to that one
- have received the maximum amount of SSP (28 weeks) and this spell of sickness links to the last one
- have taken 3 years or more 'linked periods' of sickness - where four or more days of sickness happen within eight weeks of each other, or
- are receiving Statutory Maternity Pay.

Additional eligibility criteria may be applicable in some circumstances. Further guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay/overview>

Return to work

If your Fit Note indicates that you may be able to do some work even if you are unable to undertake the full duties of your normal job, your Project/Executive Lead will discuss this with you and consider any recommendations or suggestions which may enable you to return to work sooner. However, if we cannot accommodate the recommendations, you will remain on sick leave until you are able to return to your full duties.

When you return to work, your Project/Executive Lead will arrange an informal meeting with you to:

- welcome you back

- establish the reason for your absence
- check on your fitness to return
- discuss any advice and recommendations from Occupational Health or any other related healthcare professional
- ensure that all the support you need is in place
- bring you up to date on any changes or developments within the team and organisation.

If you are approaching one of our trigger points for frequent short term absences your Project/Executive Lead will also discuss this with you and, where appropriate, inform you that any further occurrences may lead to our formal procedure being instigated and/or that we may require a medical report.

Phased return to work

In some instances, e.g. returning to work after a long term absence, or after an operation or injury, or where your GP has assessed it appropriate, a phased return to work plan may be discussed and agreed with you. This may involve a gradual increase in the number of days and/or hours worked over a defined period of time with the aim of achieving full working hours by a specified end date.

SSP will be the minimum rate of pay whilst on a phased return to work programme, unless SSP is exhausted in which case payment will be made for the actual hours worked. Consideration may be given to requests to take annual leave during a phased return.

Any amendments made as part of a phased return to work are not permanent changes to your contract of employment. If you wish to continue with the reduced or revised hours indefinitely you would be required to submit a reduced working request for a permanent change to your terms and conditions of employment. We will give all requests consideration but cannot guarantee that your request will be granted.

Medical advice

During your employment we may require you to be referred to an independent Occupational Health or medical practitioner for an assessment to be undertaken.

We may also need to request a copy of your medical reports or records to assist in the assessment of your health/medical condition. You will be asked to give your prior written consent before we approach your GP or consultant who is treating you, and you will be given a form to sign which explains your rights and obligations under the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988. You are entitled to see a copy of the documentation provided to us.

In line with data protection legislation, we will inform you about the reason for the referral or request, what we intend to do with the data obtained and the lawful reason for processing the data.

We would normally request such a report in the following circumstances: where you complain of an ongoing health problem which is affecting your ability to do your job; where you complain that any aspect of your job is creating a health problem; where your absence gives us cause for concern; where you have been absent for some time and there is doubt about when you may be able to return to work.

We may also request a medical report if we are considering dismissal for either a long term health problem or unsatisfactory attendance made up on repeated short absences. In addition, if you have any health problem that could be considered a disability we would wish to seek a report in order to obtain guidance on what, if any, reasonable adjustments should be made to assist you in performing your duties satisfactorily.

Frequent short term sickness absences

Short term absence is defined as a one-off absence or a series of short term absences, for either the same or different reasons.

Absence triggers are in place in order to help Project/Executive Leads address absence appropriately and ensure that absence is managed consistently and fairly across the organisation. The absence triggers for employees who have completed their probationary period are:

- 2 or more occasions (ie part of working day) of absence in a rolling 6 week period
- 5 or more occasions of absence in a rolling 26 week period
- 8 days or 56 hours of absence in a rolling 26 week period
- Patterns of absence emerge, e.g. Mondays and/or Fridays, after annual leave or around shift patterns
- Four weeks of continuous absence (discretion will be exercised dependent on the cause of the absence)

If you have a number of short term absences that together comprise an unacceptable overall level of absence / reach one of our trigger points, your Project/Executive Lead will meet with you informally to review your sickness record and discuss what action is required. We anticipate that the majority of attendance concerns will usually be successfully resolved through informal sickness review meetings.

Examples of actions that may be considered if you reach an absence trigger are:

- Referral to Occupational Health or a request for a medical report from your GP or consultant
- Implementation of reasonable adjustments (see the section on Disability below)
- Agreement of an Attendance Improvement Plan.

Where appropriate, you will be informed that any further occurrences could lead to formal action being taken / our Disciplinary Procedure being invoked.

If, despite warnings, your attendance remains unsatisfactory, you may ultimately be dismissed. This will be done on the grounds of unsatisfactory attendance, and will apply irrespective of whether the absences are believed to be genuine or not. If a decision is taken to dismiss, we will confirm this in writing.

It may not be appropriate to take disciplinary action if, for example, all of the absences are related to an underlying medical condition. Advice should be sought from your Project/Executive Lead regarding the most appropriate course of action.

Long term sickness absences

If you are absent from work for a period in excess of 4 weeks we will normally make arrangements to see you. This will usually be at a mutually convenient location, which may be your home, to update ourselves on your progress and to ask for your permission to obtain a GP or consultant's report, or refer you to Occupational Health. You have the right to refuse this permission, but it should be emphasised that the reason for this request is to help us manage the situation and it will usually be to your advantage to enable us to get further information about your likely date of return to work, whether any medical restrictions should be placed on your activities, and whether you have any condition which would be classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010. On receipt of the report your Project/Executive Lead will then meet with you to review the medical advice and determine the appropriate course of action. In any event, we have a duty of care to our employees and the Project/Executive Lead will take special care to keep in regular touch with an employee who is on long-term absence.

If your absence continues at a level we deem unacceptable, or if it becomes evident that there is little likelihood of a return to work, we may take a decision to dismiss on the grounds of ill health. We reserve the right to implement the procedure at any stage.

Before reaching a decision, we will take into account the nature of your illness, any advice we have received from your doctor or consultant as to your return to work and future capabilities, your length of service with us, previous absence history, and performance. If your absence is for a reason related to a disability, we will also wish to explore any ways of accommodating this. Alternatives to dismissal may also be considered, as relevant.

If a decision is taken to dismiss, this will be confirmed to you in writing together with your right of appeal.

Attendance Improvement Plans

Where formal management of excessive short term absences or long term absence is undertaken, improvements required will be documented within a written attendance improvement plan. This plan will detail:

- The improvements agreed or stated to be required
- Any support your Project/Executive Lead or CTST will provide

- The timescales for the plan, including details of any review dates.

Attendance improvement plans may be a written part of informal processes such as supervision, letters of concern or informal disciplinary procedures. They may also form part of the outcome of formal disciplinary hearings in which case they will be written into the warning or improvement letters.

Health concerns and contact with infectious and contagious diseases

If you suspect you may be suffering from, or are diagnosed as suffering from, any condition which may affect your ability to do your job, you are required to notify your Project/Executive Lead in order that we may take all reasonable steps to ensure your well-being at work. This includes notifying us of any medication you are taking which may affect your ability to work safely, or which causes drowsiness or fatigue.

If you have been in contact with an infectious or contagious disease (including diphtheria, typhoid, paratyphoid, polio or tuberculosis), you should report the fact immediately and then consult your doctor to obtain advice as to whether it is necessary to remain away from work.

You should also inform us where you have been in contact with measles, mumps, whooping cough, German measles (rubella) or chicken pox, especially if your role involves contact with someone who may be pregnant or vulnerable to infection, although you may not need to remain away from work.

Accidents whilst at work

If your absence is related in any way to an accident at work, you are reminded of the need to report this in the accident book which is held by the Executive Lead.

Disability

If you have a condition that means you might be considered disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010, CTST has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to any elements of the job which place you at a substantial disadvantage. You will be fully consulted at all times.

Reasonable adjustments to be considered may include accessible venues for meetings, an adjustment to working hours or working equipment being adapted (or special equipment to be provided) as appropriate to assist you in continuing in your role.

If there are no reasonable adjustments that can be made, or if alternative employment proves not to be a viable option, and there is no likelihood of a return to work in the near future, a decision to dismiss may be the inevitable outcome.

Absence and holiday leave

Statutory leave will continue to accrue during periods of long term absence.

You may, if you choose, request to take some of your annual leave during periods of long term sickness absence, or prior to returning to work, or during a phased return to work. If you are unable to take at least the basic four weeks' statutory holiday entitlement during the holiday year (including any bank/public holidays taken as paid leave) the shortfall may be carried forward into the next holiday year; any annual leave not taken within 18 months of the end of the holiday year in which it is accrued will normally be lost.

If you fall sick either prior to commencing planned holiday absence, or during a period of paid holiday, and would otherwise be unable to take at least the basic four weeks' statutory holiday entitlement during the holiday year (including any bank/public holidays taken as paid leave), you may request that the period of illness during your authorised holiday is converted to sick leave and the holiday be taken at a later date. In this case you may be required to provide a medical certificate covering the total period of your absence.

Return of the organisation's equipment

If you are off sick for an extended period of time (e.g. one month or more) we may require you to return work equipment until you are well enough to return to work. This could include mobile phones, laptops etc.

If you do not return to work following a period of sickness absence, you will be required to return all outstanding work equipment on or before the termination of employment date.

Absences for reasons other than sickness

Requests for time off for reasons other than sickness will be considered by your Project/Executive Lead in the light of the individual circumstances, legal requirements and operational needs.

Unauthorised absence

If you are absent from work without prior notification, we will attempt to contact you by telephone to establish the reason for your absence. If we are unable to contact you, we will send a letter to your last known address (and/or email address) requesting you contact us immediately to give an explanation for your absence and the date of likely return. If you fail to contact us, we reserve the right to stop your pay from the first day of unauthorised absence from work. Failure to provide an explanation for your absence may result in disciplinary action, which could ultimately end in dismissal.

Protecting your data

All personal data obtained during sickness absence procedures will be handled with the utmost integrity and confidentiality and in line with our Data Protection Policy. Further details about the types of data we hold, the basis for processing data and our practices in relation to that data can be found in our Staff Privacy Notice which is available as an annex to our Data Protection Policy.

Your Project/Executive Lead may keep confidential local records of all absences, including discussions and will ensure that the records clearly identify the reasons for absences.

Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with our Data Protection Policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Implementation, monitoring and review of this policy

This policy will take effect from **DATE**. The Executive Lead has overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring this policy, which will be reviewed on a regular basis following its implementation and may be changed from time to time.

Any queries or comments about this policy should be addressed to the Executive Lead.

Appendix 1 – Self Certificate Form (CTSTHR1003)

Formatted: Justified

This form should be used to record Self Certificated Sickness Absence for periods of absence of less than 7 calendar days. For periods of sickness absence exceeding 7 calendar days, a medical certificate(s) must be provided, and the Self Certificate Form should be completed for the entire period of absence on return to work. When completed, this form and medical certificate (if required) should be forwarded to your Project/Executive Lead (whoever is your appropriate Lead).

To be completed on the first day back by the employee and countersigned by your Lead .
ALL SECTIONS MUST BE COMPLETED.

Employee Name				
Dates your sickness began and ended <i>The dates you give may not be days that you normally work</i>	From		To	
Dates absent from work	From		To	
Total number of working days absent				
Reason(s) for Absence				
Did you consult a medical practitioner during your absence?	Yes ☐ No ☐			
Are you continuing to undergo any treatment or taking any medication that may affect your ability to do your job?	Yes ☐ No ☐			
Do you consider yourself to have a disability (Please ✓)	Yes ☐ No ☐			
Is the absence because of your disability?	Yes ☐ No ☐			
Is the absence due to an accident or incident at work? (Please ✓)	Yes ☐ No ☐			
Employee Signature				
I understand that if I knowingly provide false information about my absence, it will result in disciplinary action and may affect any entitlement to SSP. I certify that the above information is true.				Date:
Project or Executive Lead Signature				
I certify that the employee was absent on the above dates.				Date:

Appendix 2 – Attendance Improvement Plan (CTSTHR1004)

Attendance Improvement Plan for: _____

Name of Project or Executive Lead: _____

The concerns we discussed about the employee's attendance levels are	
Actions taken so far to get the employee's attendance back on track are	
The results of that action	
What the employee is required to do now <i>(list agreed improvements, e.g. no further unplanned absence expected in the next 3 months; no more than 1 instance in the next 12 months)</i>	
The timescale in which the employee's attendance will be monitored	
The planned absences for the employee which are acceptable during this period <i>(list if anything was agreed e.g. annual leave / medical appointments / study leave)</i>	
The consequences of the employee not improving their attendance	
Signed (Project or Executive Lead):	Signed (employee):
Date:	Date:

