

**Two million people are reported to suffer from an illness which they believe was caused by or made worse by their current or past work. 35 million working days are lost every year (1.5 days per worker), 28 million due to work-related ill health and seven million due to workplace injury.**



Employee absences are both costly and disruptive. In any year, workplace absence typically averages a cost of £601 per employee. Multiply this figure by the number of staff in your company, and take into account the disruption and lost work caused by other employees having to cover for absent colleagues, and you can see that absenteeism is a significant factor in damaging your profits.

Here are some practical steps to take:

### Track the problem

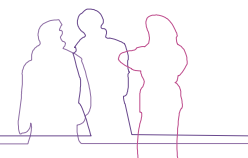
Can you identify any particular problem areas? Are there patterns of absence? Does a particular department or employee have a below average record?

### Focus on morale

Unhappy staff are more likely to take time off. A financial incentive for low absence is one solution but creating a friendly environment, where staff feel valued as part of a team and where flexible, family friendly policies are in place is likely to prove more effective at keeping absenteeism to a minimum.

### Support sick employees

Long-term sickness must be handled sensitively. An employee's permission must be sought and given before applying for a medical report. Establish whether you should keep in touch so that the employee doesn't feel isolated. Consider referring them to an occupational health specialist. This can identify ways of helping them return to work and give you an indication of how long the absence is likely to last.



## Have a clear policy - and enforce it



Make sure staff are well informed regarding sickness policy and procedures and that these are seen to be followed, and keep accurate records.

It is sensible to ensure that employers are aware of the right to request an independent medical assessment in the event of an employee taking substantial numbers of days off work. When recruiting you could check a potential employee's attendance record with their previous employer, and you may consider requiring all prospective staff to undergo a medical examination.

Make it company policy always to carry out a return to work interview. This may just let the employee know that their contribution was missed, or it could help identify underlying problems that will affect your management strategy. It may also deter staff from feigning illness.

Remember that disciplinary action for unacceptable absence must be distinguished from capability procedures related to illness. Employers need to be aware of the full range of conditions which come under the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#). In this case, reasonable adjustments must be made to help the employee return to work.

## Employee absence is a serious issue for most businesses, but there are steps you can take to reduce its impact

Vital to managing absence effectively is accurate measurement and monitoring. An organisation must know the cost of this issue, its cause, and how to reduce it. In the latest CIPD absence survey, fewer than half of employers monitor the cost of absence, only half of organisations have set a target for reducing absence and just 48 per cent of organisations benchmark themselves against other employers.

## HR-People is able to record all kinds of absence, planned or unplanned

[www.hrsolutions-intl.co.uk/hrpeople/hrpeople.htm](http://www.hrsolutions-intl.co.uk/hrpeople/hrpeople.htm)

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