

Managing unplanned absences can be difficult and risky. When not managed well, excessive absenteeism can create a significant cost for employers due to:

- Reduced productivity,
- Increased costs to cover 'replacement' employees, and
- Impact on the workplace and team morale.

Further difficulties arise where a pattern of absenteeism develops, especially when an employee has previously not been required to produce evidence to support their absence.

### Communicate Attendance Expectations

- Ensure that all employees are made aware of attendance expectations and that they understand the effects that excessive absenteeism can have on the business. Such information should be communicated to employees during their induction. This can be further supported and reinforced through communicating in your employee handbook and leave policies.

### Enforce Your Leave Policy

- Make sure that you have a Leave Policy in place which clearly sets out the procedures that employees must follow if they are not fit to attend work. Your Leave Policy should include a requirement for employees to:
  - Directly contact their line manager via telephone to notify them of their absence.
  - Contact their line manager within a specified period.
  - Provide evidence of their illness (such as a medical certificate) to support the absence.
- Make sure that your employees are aware of the consequences should they fail to comply with the requirements of the policy, such as formal disciplinary action. While as an employer you are limited regarding your ability to performance manage an employee for exercising a right to take personal leave or for periods of temporary absence due to injury or illness, you can commence disciplinary action where the employee:
  - Does not adhere to reasonable directions relating to the taking of personal leave, such as:
    - Failing to comply with established notification requirements when taking a period of leave.
    - Failing to provide evidence of the requirement to take personal leave as requested.
  - Takes a period of personal leave when an entitlement to do so did not exist (e.g., the employee took sick leave when they were not actually unfit for work due to illness or injury).
  - Does not cooperate with your efforts to meet your legal obligations in relation to managing work health and safety.
- You must give the employee a chance to explain why they did not meet the requirements and that you will consider their response.

**If you are concerned about the findings during your investigation, we suggest you contact one of our friendly HR Advisors to discuss how to proceed.**

### Follow up Employee Absences

- When an employee returns to work following a period of absence, follow up with the employee face to face to enquire about their wellbeing and to confirm they are fit to resume normal duties. Undertaking this process is a way of acknowledging the employees' health and wellbeing and highlighting the importance of being fit and well at work. It is important that they understand that their absence has not gone unnoticed.
- Checking in and following up can also support the identification of any larger or ongoing problems that may be contributing to the absenteeism as poor attendance can at times be a symptom of other issues, such as workplace conflict.

### Discuss Concerns with the Employee

- Where there are concerns regarding an employee's absenteeism, such as where there is a pattern of absences, you can discuss these with the employee. During such a discussion, you can:
  - Outline the pattern and frequency of the employee's absences from the workplace over the course of their employment.
  - Highlight your concern about the frequency of their absences and that you want to know whether there is anything that you can do to help support them in the workplace.
  - Where there is a pattern to the absences, ask the employee for an explanation as to why the absences mostly seem to occur on specific days.
  - Advise the employee that for any future absences (excluding periods of pre-approved leave), they will need to provide evidence regarding their personal leave.
  - Be clear on what the required notification procedures are for absences.

**Managing absenteeism can be challenging, we suggest you contact one of our friendly HR Advisors to discuss how we can support you through the process.**