



Covid-19 Coronavirus: Employee Advice

Overview

This guidance has been updated to reflect the announcements made by the Prime Minister and First Minister on 23 March, implementing tighter measures in the UK. Key points to note:

- The majority of operations are being shut down, with the exception of some harvesting, therefore you should assume that you are to work from home, unless you are specifically asked to attend a place of work. If you are not office-based, you will be contacted by your line manager, who will provide clarification
- Current HR policies apply but these are being reviewed regularly and exceptions made, where necessary
- For the latest information on the virus and self-isolation please refer to NHS Inform
- For information on the tighter measures please refer to the announcement

Social distancing guidance

Covid-19 can spread when people who have the virus have close, sustained contact with people who do not have the virus. This typically means spending more than 15 minutes within two metres of an infected person, such as talking to someone.

Please refer to NHS Inform for current guidance on social distancing, if your current work activities are not being undertaken from home, for example if you are involved in essential harvesting work; in closing down a site or working in the nursery.

Covid-19 – if you become unwell at work

If you begin to display symptoms of Covid-19 at work, you will be sent home.

If your symptoms are severe, you will be moved to an area at least two metres away from other people and, where possible, behind a closed door, such as in an office or first aid room. An ambulance will be called. If you need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, you should use a separate bathroom, if one is available.

You should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze. Tissues should be put in the bin immediately after use or, if no bin is available, put in a bag or pocket and then in the next available bin. If you don't have any tissues, you should cough and sneeze into the crook of your elbow. You should wash your hands thoroughly after coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom.

Tighter Measures

All employees must familiarise themselves with the tighter measures that have been put in place by the UK and Scottish Government and make sure we are all following them to the best of our ability. While some FLS employees will carry on with specific essential work, FLS employees have not been designated key worker status. The tighter measures mean it is only permissible to leave your home in the following circumstances:

- to shop for basic necessities and that should be limited to once a day
- to take exercise once a day - but alone or with your own household, not in groups
- for medical reasons or to care for a vulnerable person
- to travel to essential work if that cannot be done at home. Further guidance to employers is pending

In agreement with Police Scotland, officers will be permitted to deploy 'soft enforcement' of these measures, prior to the Scottish Government taking legal powers from Thursday, 26 March.

Notifying FLS sickness absence related to Covid-19

If you have symptoms of Covid-19, your absence must be reported using normal sickness absence reporting procedures. In other words, you should contact your manager on your first day of absence, within one hour of the time you would normally start work.

If, in exceptional circumstances, you are unable to contact your manager yourself, then a relative or friend may do this on your behalf.

Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), stating “Confirmed Symptoms of Covid-19” as the reason for absence, and send it **via e-mail** to:

absence@forestryandland.gov.scot. Absence Notifications can only be sent **electronically**, as HR staff working remotely will be unable to access or process paper copies.

Covid-19 – self certification and fit notes

If you have, or suspect you have, Coronavirus, you can self-certify for the first seven calendar days by following normal sickness absence reporting procedures.

FLS is aware that current guidance means you will not be able to attend your GP surgery to get a ‘fit note’, however you should be able to obtain an ‘isolation note’ by following the procedure set out on [NHS Inform](#).

When you return to work, must complete a [Returning from Sick Leave Form](#), stating “Confirmed Symptoms of Covid-19” as the reason for absence, and send it **via e-mail** to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot.

Covid-19 – sickness absence trigger points and sick pay entitlement

Absence related to Covid-19, whether displaying symptoms, social distancing, lockdown or other Government interventions, will not count towards normal sickness absence trigger points or the calculation of contractual sick pay entitlement. In other words, the period of absence will be discounted and you will continue to be paid as normal during this period.

Notifying FLS of sickness absence not related to Covid-19

If your sickness absence is not related to Covid-19, you should still notify your manager using normal sickness absence reporting procedures. Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), stating your reason for absence, and send it **via e-mail** to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot.

Notifying FLS that you cannot work for other reasons

In circumstances where you are symptom-free and fit to work but are unable to do so as a result of Covid-19, you will be eligible for special paid leave for this period. This means **you will continue to receive your full basic salary** during this time. These circumstances could include: there being no appropriate work for you to undertake; or you caring for a family member who has symptoms of Covid-19.

Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), detailing the reason you are unable to work, and send it to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot. This is mandatory, as FLS is required to record and monitor the number of employees who are unable to work for any reason relating to Covid-19.

Working from home

You should work from home, unless your manager has agreed an alternative arrangement, in line with Government advice.

You may have already been strictly following guidance on social distancing, for example if you are pregnant or have an underlying health condition that means you are at an increased risk of severe illness from Covid-19. If you remain symptom-free and able to work from home, please continue to do so.

You may be working from home as a result of activities being shut down or reduced. In this instance, you are not on leave and must stay available for work. You may be asked to undertake basic alternative duties that can be done at home; assist with shutting down a work site; or conducting weekly checks at sites that have been closed down. Any alternative duties will be discussed and agreed with your line manager. **You will continue to receive your full basic salary** during this time.

Guidance available on working from home

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team have produced specific guidance on home working during the Covid-19 outbreak.

You should assess whether you will be able to work from home safely by:

- reading the Covid-19 home working guidance;

- completing the Covid-19 home working checklist; and
- discussing any concerns or issues with your line manager, to see whether they can be resolved.

Digital Services have produced guidance on accessing SCOTS whilst working from home. In summary, please:

- only stay logged into the SCOTS network when you need to be - work offline wherever possible, as VPN licences are limited;
- make sure you have the right equipment - laptop, charger and mouse - and you can connect to the SCOTS network without issue; and
- familiarise yourself with Skype functionality, if you have not used it before, and, if possible, divert your work landline to your mobile.

Additional costs incurred while working from home

Working from home may incur additional costs, for example, the cost of phone calls where you do not have a work mobile/access to Skype or any additional cost for using your home broadband during the hours you are working from home. These additional cost can be claimed in the normal way, i.e. in the same way as you claim for official travel, as long as you provide documentation to support your claim.

It is important you keep in touch with your manager and colleagues so you stay connected and any issues that arise are discussed and resolved. Agree with your manager how you will keep in contact and how often.

Caring responsibilities while working from home

Following the closure of schools and nurseries, you are expected to consider all options that will allow you to continue working, wherever possible. During this period, your working hours do not need to be completed between 7am and 7pm; they can be worked at any time, so long as they are recorded - informally, on your flexi-time spreadsheet or using any other normal time-recording system in place. There is no expectation that you will be able to complete your normal working hours.

Your manager will prioritise the work to be undertaken, fully considering your wellbeing when determining what work you should do and what work cannot be completed at this time. It is recognised that it will be particularly stressful for those who are balancing work with having children at home. Everyone will do their best, during this time, to understand that colleagues may have to work differently and flexibly, depending on their circumstances.

If you have exhausted all options that would have allowed you to continue working, you will be eligible for special paid leave. This means that **you will continue to receive your full basic salary** during this time. Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), stating “caring commitments as a result of Covid-19” as the reason you are unable to work, and send it **via e-mail** to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot”.

Employees subject to a probationary period

Probation is typically an eight month process, during which there is continuous assessment and feedback. Formal probation review meetings and Probation Reports, are completed at regular intervals, normally after two, five and eight months. If you are currently subject to a probationary period, your probation will be paused from the point you:

- had a period of sickness absence related to Covid-19 or were unable to work because you are caring for a family member with Covid-19 symptoms
- were required to work from home
- were required to work from home, but unable to complete your full contractual hours due to the impacts of school and/or nursery closures
- were required to work from home and carrying out alternative duties, because you are unable to undertake your normal duties
- were required to carry out alternative duties while adhering to social distancing rules, for example shutting down a site or carrying out essential harvesting work

Even if you have been able to carry out your duties as normal, your reporting officer will not currently be able to provide you with the same level of guidance, support and development that would normally be available; be able to fully assess whether you are currently meeting the required standards of performance and attendance; and address any performance or attendance issues, as appropriate.

Your probation period will therefore restart from the point it was paused, when you return to full normal working and your reporting officer is on hand to support and guide you. This pause to probation periods will also apply, in the instance where your probation period has already been extended.

End of Year performance reviews

Under normal circumstances employees and their managers would be meeting during the month of April to complete end of year reviews. We recognise current tighter Government measures will inevitably make this more difficult than normal. The completion period has therefore been extended to the end of June, including final sign off by Confirming Officers. Meetings can take place via telephone Skype or teleconference. Alternatively, if both you and your reporting officer are carrying out essential work, meetings may take place face to face, taking account of social distancing measures.

Please refer to the HR Procedure – Performance Management, found on the [Performance Management page](#) on Saltire. Appendix 2 of the procedure provides useful guidance on the following special circumstances:

- new role or change of Reporting Officer during the review period
- employees on loan or secondment
- employees on extended sickness absence
- employees on maternity or adoption leave
- employees on an extended period of special leave

You should complete your end of year review paperwork as normal and send electronically to your Reporting Officer, wherever possible. It is important teams stay connected at this time and the end of year review is another opportunity to do this. It is understood current circumstances may have impacted on performance objectives and this should be taken into account when applying ratings. Electronic signatures on end of year review documents will be accepted and while every effort should be made by Confirming Officers to complete the final sign off, the main objective is to ensure meetings take place and ratings are recorded.

Please contact your HR Advisor or HR Business Partner for any queries, not covered in HR Procedure – Performance Management or in this document.

Impacts on HR Service and Payroll Processing

Both the HR Operational Support Team and the Pay and Reward Teams will continue to make every effort to process monthly employee changes, such as new starts, leavers and contractual changes and pay elements such as sickness absence, overtime and allowances etc. during the coming weeks.

What changes are being made?

The People Team are following current Government advice to work from home. To ensure processing is completed in line with our pay cut off dates (which cannot be adjusted), we require the following forms to be completed and sent electronically:

- employee change forms;
- absence notifications and returns;
- leaver forms ;
- overtime claims and
- expenses claims forms

We cannot provide any guarantee that forms sent by hard copy will be picked up and processed on time in the current circumstances, which is why we are adopting this new practice. Forms **should be sent electronically with immediate effect**, ensuring that changes and payments can be processed timeously while both teams work remotely.

Electronic or scanned signatures will be accepted. If you do not have access to a computer and need to submit an overtime or expenses claim form, please speak to your line manager and they can arrange for a form to be completed and sent on your behalf. Forms that are received after payroll cut off dates, will be processed for the following month's salary.

To enable forms to be processed on time you should:

- submit either a Word or PDF version of the form attached to an e-mail;
- ensure the latest version is used (most forms are now on Saltire under the My Workplace Section); and

- complete in full, clearly showing details such as name, pay reference etc. You can find your payroll number by logging on to I-Trent via the following link: [Employee Self Service](#)

All forms **must** be signed and countersigned by either your line manager or confirming officer, where appropriate to ensure they are not returned to you, thus delaying payment.

Where should I send forms to?

All **pay** related forms should be sent to the Pay and Reward mail box at:

payroll@forestryandland.gov.scot.

All **sickness** related forms should now be sent to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot.

All **other** employee related forms such as the new starter, leavers, ECN forms etc. should be sent to: hr@forestryandland.gov.scot.

Annual Leave

While it is recognised holiday plans may have been altered or cancelled as a result of current Government measures, you should continue to apply for and take pre-booked annual leave. Annual leave balances must be managed proactively to ensure we are all taking annual leave at regular intervals throughout the annual leave year, thus supporting our wellbeing. In due course, when restrictions are lightened or lifted, increased levels of annual leave requests will need to be carefully managed to ensure adequate service provision is in place.

Annual Leave – carry forwards

The HR Procedure – Annual Leave and Public/Privilege Holidays outlines the position on carry forwards of annual leave: If you have unused annual leave at the end of the annual leave year, providing you have taken 28 days' leave including Public/Privilege Holidays, you may carry over the excess for use in future years. You can 'bank' a cumulative maximum of 20 days annual leave without line manager approval. From April 2021, in line with the revised Agency terms and conditions, the ability to carry forward annual leave will be reduced to 10 days without approval and to 20 days in exceptional circumstances.

Proactive management of annual leave balances will help to ensure annual leave is not lost, when the carry forward period is reduced to 10 days in April 2021.

The only situation where carry forwards will be relaxed is where you have been designated as carrying out essential work during the Covid-19 period and may not have an opportunity to take leave. In this situation, you will be permitted to carry over up to 20 days (if you have already taken 28 days' annual leave and PH/PPH) into the 2021/22 leave year, on the basis the additional 10 days would be used by end of September 2021.

More information on management of annual leave and carry forwards is available at [Annual Leave, Public and Privilege Holidays](#) on Saltire.

Overtime

Normal arrangements for overtime continue to apply, including those for claiming overtime or time off in lieu. Overtime remains at management's discretion and must be authorised in advance. Given the majority of activities are reducing, it is unlikely that overtime will be required, however if it is, your manager will discuss this with you.

Updating your contact details

There may be times when FLS need to contact you in an emergency, for example, to check that you are safe and well.

You are encouraged to keep your contact details, including your emergency contact details, updated on iTrent in the Employee Self Service section. You can access I-Trent via the following link: [Employee Self Service](#).

There is an iTrent specific FAQ on these pages that details who can see and access personal details and also provides guidance for accessing and using this system.