Covid-19 Coronavirus: Employee Advice

Overview

This guidance reflects the move to Phase 3 of Scotland’s route map through and out of the crisis from 9 July. Key points to note are:

- Current HR policies apply but these are being reviewed regularly and exceptions made, where necessary
- For the latest information on Test and Protect, self-isolation and available support please refer to NHS Inform
- For information on the current restrictions in place, please refer to the route map

Physical distancing at work

As we move through the phases of the route map, and our activity begins to increase, we want to encourage and work with all employees to ensure their own safety and the safety of others is at the forefront of everyone’s mind in terms of our thoughts and behaviours. This means all employees familiarising themselves with re-opening guidance, completing or following risk assessments and instructions and asking questions wherever they are unclear. It also means encouraging and reminding others to comply with physical distancing measures put in place and challenging behaviours, where appropriate or escalating concerns through line management.

We recognise this may be a difficult transition period to a new way of working and our aim is to work together to achieve this through clear guidance and signage and employee cooperation. Ongoing dialogue between managers and employees is encouraged to provide clarity on expectations, to dispel any myths and to allay and resolve any concerns raised. In the event that repeated or deliberate breaches of physical distancing are reported, these will be investigated under the Agency Discipline Procedure and if substantiated, would be deemed to constitute serious misconduct.
Whistleblowing

The ways in which we work may have temporarily changed, however the need for you to be able to raise concerns when things go wrong has not. Whistleblowing can be a valuable early-warning system and we appreciate employees need to feel safe and supported, now more than ever, when you speak up and that issues are properly investigated and resolved.

It is important all that employees across the Agency understand what whistleblowing is; how and where to raise and escalate concerns; the difference between whistleblowing and grievances and where they can get independent advice as a whistle blower.

You can escalate concerns of suspected wrong doing, which you consider to be in the public interest to your line manager or someone in your line management chain; a member of the Executive Team or Chief Executive; Head of People and Organisational Development; or the designated Nominated Officer in either Agency. If these routes are not appropriate due to the seriousness of the concern or efforts to report concerns internally have failed, you can raise your concerns to the Civil Service Commission.

Covid-19 – if you become unwell at work

If you are currently undertaking work away from home and begin to display symptoms of Covid-19, 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.
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, physical 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.

Due to the pressures likely to be faced by GP practices and the need to follow advice on self-isolation, for this period only, a ‘Fit Note’ will not be required for the first 14 days of absence.

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; your work has been designated essential but you are required to self-isolate; or you are 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 continue to 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 physical 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.

For guidance on homeworking, please refer to the [Home and Alternative Working Arrangements Guide](#).

**Caring responsibilities while working from home**

During this period of school holidays and reduced childcare options, 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 and it is understood you will have to find a balance of work and caring responsibilities that works for you and your individual circumstances.

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](mailto: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.

Managers were asked to pause probationary periods following the implementation of tighter measures in March.
In recognising that alternative ways of working will continue for some time, we have adapted the Probation Procedure to enable the majority of employees to continue their probation or be confirmed in post, as appropriate.

Your manager will discuss the best way to take your probationary period forward with you and how this will work.

**End of Year performance reviews**

Under normal circumstances employees and their managers would have met during the month of April to complete end of year reviews. The completion period was therefore extended to the end of June, including final sign off by Confirming Officers.

**Forward Job Plans**

Due to the impact of Covid-19 on working lives, line managers will need to consider the content of Forward Job Plans and the impact this may have on objectives for the new performance year. Employees may have not been at work; unable to progress work; or work may have changed as a result of Covid-19; and adjustments to objectives may need made as a result of this. Employees should not be assessed against objectives that it was not possible for them to complete due to Covid-19.

**HR Processes**

A number of HR processes would normally involve face to face meetings, for example:

- disciplinary investigations and hearings
- grievance investigations and hearings
- long and short term attendance meetings
- performance improvement meetings
- probationary and performance management reviews

We will be adhering to current ACAS guidance on managing discipline and grievance procedures during the pandemic. The principles of this guidance are that any process still has to be fair and reasonable, taking into account physical distancing measures and home working.
This includes ensuring that discipline and grievance cases are progressed consistently and promptly and without unreasonable delay, to avoid a negative impact on the parties involved. Formal meetings that would normally be undertaken face to face can therefore take place by Skype or teleconference, to avoid undue delays.

Careful consideration will be taken by managers, working in close liaison with HR Business Partners to ensure that our processes do remain fair and reasonable at this time and that any concerns raised by employees are addressed sensitively and timeously.

**Impacts on HR Service and Payroll Processing**

Both the HR Operational Support Team and the Pay and Reward Teams have continued to process monthly employee changes, such as new starts, leavers and contractual changes and pay elements such as sickness absence, overtime and allowances etc. as normal.

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 this new practice has been adopted. Forms should be sent electronically, 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 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 though out the annual leave year, thus supporting our wellbeing. As we move through the phases of the road map, 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.