



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta, Acmhainní Daonna

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhísí Sláinte

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To: Chief Executive Officer
Each National Director
Each Assistant National Director HR
Each Assistant Chief Finance Officer
Each Hospital Group CEO
Each Hospital Group Director of HR
Each Chief Officer CHOs
Each Head of HR CHOs
Each CEO Section 38 Agencies
Each HR Manager Section 38 Agencies
Each Employee Relations Manager
Each Group Director of Nursing & Midwifery
Each Clinical Director

From: Anne Marie Hoey, National Director of Human Resources

Date: 9th April 2020

Re: HR Circular 027/2020 Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19 in relation to working arrangements and temporary assignments across the Public Service (including updates to 9th April 2020).

Dear Colleagues

I wish to advise that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) has issued its revised **Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19 in relation to working arrangements and temporary assignments across the Public Service, including updates to 9th April 2020 (Appendix A)**. This guidance document for Civil and Public Service employers consolidates and supersedes previous guidance and FAQs issued by DPER relating to Civil and Public Service working arrangements and temporary assignments during COVID-19.

The updated DPER Guidance and FAQs should be read in conjunction with the following:

1. Attendance in the workplace during COVID-19

1.1 Please refer to *HSE HR Circular 19/2020: Essential service under new Public Health Guidelines COVID-19* [view here](#).

Only essential workers are now to be physically present in the workplace. Employees who are required to stay at home, and are not ill, should be facilitated to work from home to the maximum extent possible.

1.2 If remote working in an employee's current role is not feasible, they are still to be considered as actively on duty and available for work, including temporary assignment of work outside of their usual core duties. Employees in this situation will continue to be paid provided they are available for work¹. Managers are required to maintain regular contact with employees and to continue to explore opportunities for work which the employee can perform to enable them to remain as productive as possible during this period.

2. Temporary Assignments

2.1 Section 3 of the FAQs should be read in conjunction with **HSE HR Circular 022/2020 - Temporary Assignment Scheme across the Civil and Public Service in response to the challenge of COVID-19** [view here](#).

3. COVID-19 Special Leave with Pay Arrangements

3.1 The COVID-19 special leave with pay arrangements apply to public servants only. Employers/managers will need to determine which workers fall into the category of public health service employees. Managers are required to refer to the updated DPER FAQs to determine which employees are eligible for special leave with pay for COVID-19.

3.2 Special leave with pay for COVID-19 will only apply when an employee is advised to self-isolate and is displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or had a positive test. Appropriate medical/HSE confirmation/advice of the need to self-isolate and/or a diagnosis of COVID-19 will be required.

3.3 Special leave with pay only applies to periods of medically/HSE recommended self-isolation, and also to medical diagnoses of COVID-19 infection **where the employee is not well enough to work from home**. The HSE sets out the latest criteria for self-isolation [view here](#). Special leave with pay to eligible employees will apply for the number of days advised by the HSE/doctor. An employee is required to adhere to medical or HSE advice. Employees are not entitled to days in lieu of bank holidays whilst in receipt of special leave with pay.

3.4 The HSE has identified a further group who are extremely medically vulnerable and the details of this group are available [HERE](#). The advice for this group is to "cocoon" and stay at home and not attend the workplace. This is until 12th April and this date will be under continuous review. Employees who are deemed to be extremely medically vulnerable and are required to cocoon during this timeframe should be facilitated to work from home to the maximum extent possible. This may include temporary assignment to other duties/a different role which the employee can perform at home.

¹ As employees in this situation may be assigned alternative duties at any stage during COVID-19, they will continue to be paid their normal basic salary and fixed allowances (where applicable) pending such assignment. Employees in this situation are considered to be available for duty and therefore should **not** be treated as being on special leave with pay for COVID-19, ordinary sick leave, annual leave or any other type of leave (unless such leave was already pre-booked/confirmed in the normal manner).

3.5 Employers/managers and staff need to be flexible and explore opportunities for assigning appropriate work that employees can complete at home, having regard to the individual circumstances of each case. Managers should continue to engage with their employees in this regard. As employees in this situation may be assigned alternative duties at any stage during COVID-19, they will continue to be paid their normal basic salary and fixed allowances (where applicable) pending identification/assignment of appropriate duties. Employees in this situation are considered to be available for duty and therefore should **not** be treated as being on special leave with pay for COVID-19, ordinary sick leave, annual leave or any other type of leave (unless such leave was already pre-booked/confirmed in the normal manner).

3.6 As previously advised, the general principles applying to the management of sick leave, as outlined in the HSE's *Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure* and *HSE Rehabilitation of Employees Back to Work after Illness or Injury Policy*, will continue to apply. This includes the requirement for managers and employees to maintain regular contact during the period of special leave with pay. Both policies are available [HERE](#). Section 38 organisations should refer to their relevant HR policies and procedures.

3.7 When granting special leave with pay, health service employees are expected to comply at once with any directions which may be given by his/her employer and to take all practicable steps to resume duty as soon as possible. Otherwise, unless adequate reason is shown for non-compliance, the question of withholding pay will arise.

3.8 In the event of non-compliance with the provisions of special leave with pay (including the requirement to provide bona fide confirmation of self-isolation/diagnosis of COVID-19) the disciplinary procedure may be invoked.

3.9 As stated in previous Circulars and FAQs, special leave with pay while absent from work due to COVID-19 is based on basic salary and fixed allowances only and excludes unsocial hours premium payments. The total payment is made by the employer. **Public servants who can avail of the special leave with pay for COVID-19 are excluded from claiming the special DEASP COVID-19 illness benefit payment.** Any instances of public health service employees found to be in receipt of both special leave with pay and the COVID-19 illness benefit will be subject to disciplinary action and the appropriate amount shall be recouped from his/her salary.

3.10 Special leave with pay for COVID-19 is being used in place of normal sick pay for public servants and should be recorded separately as **“Covid-19 Paid Leave”**. This separate classification is important for the following reasons:

- (i) to ensure that periods of COVID-19 absences covered by special leave with pay do not impact on an employee's entitlements under the public service sick leave scheme, and
- (ii) to comply with DPER/Department of Health directions to provide an aggregate summary of data/costings for the public health sector. The HSE and each Section 38 employer is required to ensure that relevant data² and all expenditure in relation to

² <https://dataprotection.ie/en/news-media/blogs/data-protection-and-covid-19>

special leave with pay for COVID-19 can be tracked separately in order to ensure that all exceptional spending on COVID-19 within the health sector is capable of being identified and reported on at national level.

3.11 Please note that HSE HR Circular 8/2020 – HSE National Collection of Daily Absence for COVID-19 sets out further details in relation to the new absence codes to be used by managers to record employee absences specifically relating to COVID-19 and the reporting arrangements for COVID-19 absences. This Circular is available [here](#). Please refer also to HSE HR Circular 18/2020 on the reporting requirements under the HSE National Collection of Twice Weekly Absence for COVID-19 [here](#).

3.12 Any non-COVID-19 illness will be recorded as ordinary sick leave and the usual rules governing the public service sick leave scheme will apply.

4. Recording advice of the need to self-isolate

4.1 The DPER FAQs state that appropriate medical/HSE confirmation of the need to self-isolate and/or a diagnosis of COVID-19 will be required. In the event that written confirmation is not available, the recording of medical or HSE advice to self-isolate will take the form of a self-declaration. This does not mean that employees can voluntarily choose to self-isolate. Medical/HSE advice will be required, however the reporting of same will take the form of a self-declaration where the employee does not have access to written medical certification. In such cases the employee will be required to complete the *Self-Declaration Form for Special Leave with Pay* and submit to his/her manager for approval.

4.2 An updated version of the following are attached³:

- Guidance for public health service employees in relation to COVID-19 self-isolation and restricted movement notifications – **Appendix B**
- Guidance for managers when notified of COVID-19 self-isolation or restricted movement–**Appendix C**
- COVID-19 Self-Declaration Form for Public Health Service Employees for Special Leave with Pay⁴ – **Appendix D**

These documents reflect the revised text in the DPER FAQs and replace the documents issued under HSE HR Circular 16/2020. HSE and Section 38 employers are required to put arrangements in place to ensure the distribution and implementation of these updated documents. Managers should clearly communicate to employees the information required to be provided in relation to COVID-19 self-isolation and restricted movement and the notification process as outlined in the guidance documents.

5. Employees with caring arrangements

5.1 There is no special paid leave available for COVID-19 caring arrangements during this time. All forms of flexible working must be considered including working from home where possible and/or working adjusted hours to facilitate employees to balance work and

³ The updated Form and guidance documents refer to “restricted movements” (formerly called self-quarantine).

⁴ This Form is intended solely for those employees who meet the criteria for special leave with pay as set out in the DPER FAQs but do not have access to medical certification.

caring responsibilities. If employees are not set up for remote working at present, they need to continue to remain available to work, and their employer/manager should identify work that can be given to them. Employers/managers are required to identify and engage with employees on alternative arrangements e.g. staggering hours, wider opening hours including weekend work, and temporary assignment to another role.

5.2 If employees cannot work outside the home and cannot perform their current role remotely, the employee is still to be considered as actively on duty and available to work⁵. Employers/managers are required to be flexible and innovative in terms of ensuring that employees remain as productive as possible during this time and this may include assigning work outside the employee's usual core duties.

5.3 Any employee who wishes to avail of existing leave allowances during this time should submit their request to their manager in the normal manner. This includes annual leave, parental leave and other leave schemes to which the employee may be entitled. Managers should consider such requests in light of service requirements and the employee's particular circumstances.

6. Employees who live with 'high risk' individuals

6.1 Special leave with pay does not apply in such circumstances. Employers/managers should facilitate flexible working including working from home where possible in these circumstances. Where the employee's role cannot be performed at home and the employee is required to attend a workplace as an essential worker, they are required to adhere to the HSE guidelines on social distancing to minimise risk of transmission. Please refer to HSE advice [HERE](#).

6.2 There are other flexible working options that employers/managers can offer to employees in addition to home working arrangements e.g. staggered hours, wider opening hours. These measures can help facilitate segregation of the workforce and social distancing as well as support employees in managing caring responsibilities at home (including facilitating shared caring arrangements).

7. Requests to postpone, cancel or reschedule pre-booked leave

7.1 Requests from employees to postpone, cancel or reschedule pre-booked leave (e.g. annual leave) should be considered on a case-by-case basis having regard to service requirements and the employee's particular circumstances. Requests to amend existing parental leave arrangements should be based on service requirements where the employee is/will be performing essential duties. In such cases the consent of the employer/employee to amend the existing parental leave arrangements should be documented in writing and a revised confirmation document will be required.

⁵ As employees in this situation may be assigned alternative duties at any stage during COVID-19, they will continue to be paid their normal basic salary and fixed allowances (where applicable) pending such assignment. Employees in this situation are considered to be available for duty and therefore should **not** be treated as being on special leave with pay for COVID-19, sick leave, annual leave or any other type of leave (unless such leave was already pre-booked/confirmed in the normal manner).

8. Employees availing of the Shorter Working Year Scheme

8.1 The expectation is that any shorter working year arrangement that is scheduled will go ahead as planned. Where there is an essential service requirement, it may be possible for employers to cancel/postpone leave to be taken under this scheme with the agreement of the employee. In exceptional circumstances, employers may agree to defer at the employee's request, subject to service requirements.

9. Employees on Probation

9.1 A flexible and pragmatic approach to the management of staff on probation should be adopted at this time. If possible, the assessment of a probationer's performance in their current role should continue. This may take place remotely depending on the role and particular circumstances. For those employees whose probationary assessment continues, managers should ensure that they have clearly defined objectives and duties that continue to be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Managers should continue to provide support to enable the employee to perform to the required standards and demonstrate their suitability in the position to which they were appointed.

9.2 If it is not possible to proceed with the probationary process (e.g. employee was temporarily assigned to different duties) it may be paused and resumed when the employee returns to their original role. If a probation is to be paused, the relevant manager is required to formally and clearly communicate this to the employee in writing from the outset. Managers should consult their local HR/Employee Relations Department for further advice in relation to employees whose probationary assessment is being paused at this time and a written record should be put on the employee's personnel file.

10. Flexi-time arrangements

10.1 The normal operation of flexi-time or equivalent attendance management systems, including any flexi-time accruals and deficits, are being temporarily suspended during the period of COVID-19 to facilitate the required new ways of working across the public service. This does not preclude employers from using clocking in and out arrangements that apply. For those employees who normally avail of flexi-time systems, any balances accrued before the suspension of flexi-time can remain and be held over until the COVID-19 working arrangements are no longer in place and the suspension is lifted.

11. Employees on unpaid leave

11.1 The COVID-19 pandemic unemployment payment is designed as a short-term response to those who are fully unemployed as a result of the pandemic. In the public health service, there exists a range of leave arrangements, underpinned by job security, which employees may avail of during this period e.g. parental leave etc. These leave arrangements, along with the flexible and innovative work attendance regimes and scope for temporary reassignment within the health service, mean that the pandemic unemployment payment is not available in such circumstances.

12. Guidance on what to do if an employee becomes unwell in the workplace showing symptoms of COVID-19

12.1 The DPER FAQs contain the following:

- Guidance for public service employees in the instance that they become unwell in the workplace showing symptoms of COVID-19 (Appendix 2 of FAQs)

- Guidance for managers in the in the instance that an employee becomes unwell in the workplace showing symptoms of COVID-19 (Appendix 3 of FAQs)

12.2 This guidance may be supplemented by further guidance from the HSE for public health service employers and staff. The DPER guidance outlined in the FAQs should be read in conjunction with HSE advice which is being updated on an ongoing basis. ***It is important to emphasise that any employee who is feeling unwell should not attend the workplace.*** This applies to any transmissible illness during this Covid-19 emergency period. The health and wellbeing of our employees is of utmost importance and all managers and employees are required to adhere to these guidelines and the most up to date HSE advice in this area.

Please ensure that this Circular, updated FAQs and related documents are brought to the attention of managers within your area of responsibility and updated information is disseminated to all employees (including those who are absent from work on any type of leave).

Queries

Queries from individual employees or managers regarding these arrangements should be referred to local HR Departments/Employee Relations Departments.

Queries from HR Departments on this Circular and related documents may be referred to Anna Killilea, Corporate Employee Relations, HR Directorate, 63-64 Adelaide Road, Dublin 2. Tel: 01 6626966, Email: anna.killilea@hse.ie

Yours sincerely



Anne Marie Hoey
National Director of Human Resources



"To view the Health Services People Strategy 2019 - 2024 please click [here](#)."

Need information and advice on COVID-19 Go to www.hse.ie/coronavirus