



## SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

### Introduction

As a company, Cove UK is committed to promoting the health, safety, and wellbeing of our team members and that's why we have implemented this sickness absence policy. We aim to encourage all our team members to maximise their attendance at work whilst recognising that team members will, from time to time, be unable to come to work because of ill health.

This Sickness Absence policy outlines the necessary procedures that need to be followed if a team member falls ill and is unable to work.

By implementing this policy, we aim to strike a reasonable balance between the operational needs of the business and the genuine need of team members to take time off work because of ill health.

This policy does not form part of team members' terms and conditions of employment and may be subject to change from time to time.

### Definitions

The following definitions are used in this policy:

**"Period of sickness absence"** or **"instance of sickness absence"** means any continuous period of sickness absence, of whatever length, during which the team member does not work.

**"Short-term sickness absence"** means any period of sickness lasting one day to three weeks.

**"Long-term sickness absence"** means any period of sickness lasting more than three weeks.

**"Formal review period"** means a defined period during which a team member is required to show an improvement in their sickness absence levels.

### Scope

This policy covers various aspects such as the duration of sickness, payment whilst off sick and the steps you must take to notify us of your absence. As a team member we expect you to be familiar with this policy to understand what is expected of you in case of sickness. It also advises of the actions relating to our Disciplinary Process if the company suspects there to be any form of misconduct. For example, we may take disciplinary action if there is evidence that:

- absence is not genuine or not for the reason provided.
- the correct sickness absence notification and evidence procedure has not been followed; or
- the team member is undertaking inappropriate activities while off sick.

This policy applies to team members only and does not apply to contractors, consultants, agency workers or any self-employed individuals working for Cove UK.

## Team Accommodation

Any team member considered to be on long term sickness i.e., lasting over three weeks or confirmed by a fit note to continue over three weeks is required to vacate their accommodation.

## Responsibilities

Line managers should:

- take responsibility for managing and controlling their team member's attendance and absence, recording instances using Dayforce.
- require the team member to complete a self-certification form for sickness of seven calendar days or less using Quick Links on Dayforce and to provide medical evidence for sickness of more than seven calendar days.
- conduct a return-to-work meeting each time the team member returns from a period of sickness absence (Manager Quick Link on Dayforce).
- speak to the team member about the absence and the reason for it in a fair and factual way.
- be supportive towards the team member and, where appropriate, seek to identify ways in which to assist the team member to improve their attendance in the future.
- be alert to patterns of absence.
- try to establish any underlying reasons for frequent absences and seek medical advice (e.g., occupational health), if appropriate.
- be reasonable and sympathetic towards the team member's sickness absence, while at the same time making clear that continuing frequent absences from work are unacceptable.
- check whether the team member's absences are in any way work related, for example because of workplace stress.
- keep confidential records of all absences, including discussions and medical certificates, by uploading the information to Dayforce.
- be aware of the potential for discrimination when managing absence, particularly where the team member's ill health is related to pregnancy or disability, where a reasonable adjustment may be a solution, and
- consult with the HR Team if unsure about anything or special circumstances arise, for example if it appears that the team member may have a disability.

Team members should:

- if they are unable to attend work because of ill health, notify their manager **by telephone** as soon as reasonably practicable, no later than one hour before they are due to begin work. If the team member's manager is unavailable, the team member should contact the next most appropriate person within the department.

- continue to notify and keep in touch with their manager **daily** while unable to attend work. Managers can use their discretion and can agree different arrangements with the team members, for example if the team member is hospitalised.
- be prepared to give their manager a clear reason (i.e., the nature of the illness or injury) why they cannot attend work and estimate how long they think the absence will last.
- complete a self-certification form for sickness of seven calendar days or less using the Quick Link on Dayforce (and provide medical evidence for sickness of more than seven calendar days).
- attend a return-to-work meeting with their manager each time the team member returns from a period of sickness absence.
- be open with their manager about the reasons for their absence, to give the manager the opportunity to provide support where possible.
- tell their manager of any extenuating circumstances, for example personal or family problems or an unmanageable workload.
- bear in mind that we may seek a medical report, for example from the team member's doctor or our occupational health advisers; and
- cooperate with us regarding the possible implementation of any adjustments to job duties, hours or working conditions, particularly those suggested by a healthcare professional.

## Notification and evidence of sickness absence

Notification of sickness absence must be via telephone, rather than text message, email or social media. In exceptional circumstances where the team member is unable to telephone (for example, because of hospitalisation), another person such as a friend or relative can contact us on their behalf.

If a team member comes to work but needs to leave during the day because of ill health, they should inform their manager before leaving work. If the manager is unavailable, the team member should inform the next most appropriate person within the department.

**Sickness absence that begins part way through the day will count as one full day's sickness absence if the team member leaves before completing 50% of their working day. Where sickness absence begins after the team member has completed 50% of their working day, this should be recorded as half a day's absence.**

## Self-certification of sickness absence

If sickness is for seven calendar days or less, on the first day of the team member's return to work, they must complete and sign a self-certification form (available on Dayforce Quick Links), setting out the dates of absence and the nature of the illness or injury. The line manager should email this to HR@cove.co.uk.

## Statement of fitness for work (fit note)

All sickness that lasts longer than seven calendar days requires medical evidence. This medical evidence will normally be in the form of a fit note, also known as a "statement of fitness for work".



If the team member's sickness lasts for eight calendar days or more, the team member's line manager must ensure that the team member provides a fit note as soon as possible.

A fit note may state that the team member:

- is "not fit for work", in which case the team member should remain off work; or
- "May be fit for work", if the healthcare professional's recommendations are followed (for example, a phased return, amended job duties, altered hours of work, or workplace adaptations).

Managers should take the recommendations seriously and give fair consideration as to how the changes recommended can be accommodated.

## Sick pay

Eligible team members are entitled to statutory sick pay (SSP) if they follow our usual notification and evidence requirements.

The team member is entitled to SSP where they have a period of sickness absence from work of at least four calendar days in a row and three "waiting days" (days on which the team member would usually be required to work) have passed.

Statutory sick pay is payable for up to 28 weeks in any one period of sickness absence, at a weekly rate set by the Government for the relevant tax year.

## Medical appointments

We recognise that team members will, from time to time, need to attend medical appointments.

Team members should endeavour to arrange medical appointments in their own time or, if this is not possible, at times that will cause the minimum amount of absence from work or inconvenience to the operation.

If it is not possible to arrange medical appointments outside working hours, it is our policy to permit reasonable time off work for such appointments. The team member should produce confirmation of the appointment to their line manager.

Provided that the team member gives their line manager reasonable notice of the date and time of an appointment, time off will normally be granted. The line manager has the discretion either to require the team member to make up for the time off by working extra time on another occasion, or to grant the time off without pay.

Team members must obtain approval from their line manager in advance of any appointment. The line manager reserves the right to ask the team member to reschedule an appointment if its timing would cause disruption to the business.

## Return to work

On a team member's first day back after any period of sickness absence, the team member should either fill in a self-certification form (if not already completed) or provide medical evidence (where the sickness is longer than seven calendar days).

**Their manager should conduct a return-to-work meeting within the first 48 hours of the team member's return using the Sickness Return to Work Form in Dayforce Quick links. This meeting should take place privately and be confidential.**

The manager should check the team member's absence record to identify whether the need for formal action under our absence management procedure has been triggered.

The manager should check absences 12 months prior to the date of the team member's return to work. For example, if the team member returns to work on 1 April, the employer should examine the period from 1 April the previous year to 31 March.

The line manager should bear in mind that special considerations apply to absences related to pregnancy and disability and part-time working.

When checking the team member's absence record, the line manager should also review whether the team member's absences have been frequent, regular or repeated. The manager should be alert to the possibility of any pattern. Managers should, however, remain open minded and not jump to any hasty conclusions about a team member's absences.

**The line manager should invite the team member to an informal return-to-work meeting each time the team member returns from a period of sickness absence.**

The line manager should update the team member's absence record on Dayforce for payroll purposes.

Completed RTW forms should be uploaded to Dayforce via the 'notes' section.

## Special cases

### *Pregnancy-related absences*

Pregnant team members who are off work because of pregnancy-related ill health must abide by our absence reporting procedure. For example, a pregnant team member is subject to the usual notification and evidence requirements and can be asked to attend a return-to-work meeting when returning to work.

However, any sickness absence by a pregnant team member for a pregnancy-related reason should not be included when checking to see if the need for formal action under our absence management procedure has been triggered.

If the manager is in any doubt as to whether a pregnant team member's absence is related to their pregnancy, the manager should contact the HR team for clarification.

Team members who are pregnant have the statutory right not to be unreasonably refused paid time off work for antenatal appointments. The team member should produce confirmation of the appointment to their line manager.

Paid time off in such circumstances will automatically be granted, although team members should endeavour to arrange appointments outside working hours. The team member should give reasonable notice of the date and time of the appointment to their line manager where possible and the line manager will still have the right to request to see the confirmation of the team member's second appointment and any subsequent appointments.

A prospective father, or partner of a pregnant woman, has the statutory right to take unpaid time off to attend up to two antenatal appointments.

## **Disability-related absences**

Where a team member gives as the reason for absence an underlying health issue that could amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010, the manager must refer the team member to the HR Team. Managers should remember that we are under a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled team members. The legal definition of a "disability" is wide and where the absence is wholly or partly for a disability-related reason, the trigger points referred to in this policy may need to be modified to take proper account of the team member's disability, and other adjustments to the procedures set out in this policy may need to be made. If in doubt, the manager should contact the HR Team for clarification.

## **Sickness absence and annual leave**

If a team member is ill or is injured before the start of a period of planned holiday, and is consequently unable to take the holiday, we will agree to the team member postponing the holiday dates to another mutually agreed time. Any period of sickness absence will then be treated in accordance with our normal policy on sickness absence. The team member must submit a written request to postpone the planned holiday, and this must be accompanied by medical evidence confirming that they are unfit, or are likely to be unfit, to take the holiday.

## **Holiday during sick leave**

A team member who is absent on sick leave will continue to accrue their contractual holiday entitlement and will be given the opportunity to take this later, including in the subsequent leave year, if they do not take their contractual holiday entitlement due to being on sick leave.

A team member on sick leave may apply to take their holiday entitlement while on sick leave. The line manager must approve the holiday dates.

## Medical advice

At various stages of managing the team member's sickness absence, a manager may want to obtain advice on the team member's fitness for work from occupational health advisers.

Examples of when a line manager might refer to occupational health include to:

- seek a medical report on the team member.
- establish when the team member might be able to return to work.
- ask for guidance on the team member's condition, for example if there is a possibility that the team member is disabled or ambiguity as to the exact nature of the condition; and
- if the team member is disabled, discuss any adjustments that could be made to accommodate the team member's disability.

The team member's permission will be sought on the relevant consent form, available from the HR Team.

The team member has the right to access the report before we see it.

When requesting a report, we will provide the medical practitioner with as much information as possible on the role of the team member and explain why the report is being sought. We will provide the medical practitioner with:

- a copy of the team member's signed form consenting to the request to seek a medical report.
- details of the major features of the team member's job.
- We will ask the medical practitioner to identify:
- the nature of the team member's illness or injury.
- whether or not there are any underlying medical conditions that explain the team member's pattern of absences; and
- what reasonable adjustments could be made to working conditions or work premises to facilitate a return to work.

Where the team member refuses to consent to a medical report, we will explain to the team member the reasons behind the request and inform the team member that a decision relating to their employment may be made without the benefit of access to medical reports. The same procedure will be followed where the team member delays in giving their consent.

Where the team member feels that the report is misleading or incorrect, they may ask the medical practitioner to amend it. If the medical practitioner does not agree with the team member and does not alter the report, the team member may attach a statement to the report to reflect their views.

Alternatively, having seen the report, the team member may request that access to the report be withheld from us. The team member will be informed that a decision relating to employment may be made without the benefit of access to medical reports.

## Sickness absence management

The trigger points that are used to decide when action needs to be taken to tackle a team member's sickness absence record are set out below. When applying these trigger points, the special rules that apply to pregnancy and disability and part-time working must always be borne in mind. The stages set out below are guidelines only.

### Stage 1

The trigger points for a "stage 1" sickness absence formal review is:

- more than 1 instance of sickness in a rolling 3-month period.
- more than 3 instances of sickness in a rolling 12-month period.

On the team member reaching a stage 1 trigger point, the team member's line manager will invite them in writing to a stage 1 sickness absence formal review meeting. In advance of the meeting, the line manager should ensure they have the information relevant to the team member's case, including:

- the team member's absence record from Dayforce
- any letters previously sent to the team member about their absence levels; and
- any other supporting documentation.

The written invitation to the stage 1 sickness absence formal review meeting should give the team member at least 24 hours' notice of the meeting. The letter should advise the team member who will be present and that the team member can be accompanied by a fellow worker or trade union official.

The letter should explain to the team member that the purpose of the meeting is to review the team member's unsatisfactory attendance level.

The letter should warn the team member that an outcome of the meeting is that they may be given a warning.

The Stage 1 sickness absence formal review meeting will be chaired by the team member's line manager. The line manager will be accompanied by a notetaker to take notes of the meeting. The meeting agenda is contained in the letter inviting the employee to a Stage 1 Sickness Absence Review.

After the meeting, the line manager will set out in writing what has been decided because of the stage 1 meeting, for example if a warning is being issued, or if the decision is that no further action will be taken.

If a warning is being issued, this will remain active on the team member's file for a period of 12 months. The letter should give the team member the right to appeal against the warning and should be provided to the team member within 5 days of the meeting where possible.



The letter should also include details of any steps or targets that have been agreed to help the team member to improve their attendance, and any support that we are providing for the team member.

If during the next 12 months, the team member's sickness absence exceeds these measures, the next stage will be triggered.

#### *No further action*

In limited circumstances, for example if there are extenuating reasons for the absences, the outcome of a stage 1 short-term sickness absence formal review meeting could be that the manager decides that it is not appropriate to take further action.

If the decision is that no further action will be taken, the letter should inform the team member of this and provide an explanation for the decision.

#### **Stage 2**

The trigger point for a stage 2 sickness review for a team member on a stage 1 warning is:

- a further instance of sickness absence during the term of the warning.

On reaching a stage 2 trigger point, the team member's line manager will invite them in writing to a stage 2 short-term sickness absence formal review meeting.

The meeting will be chaired by the team member's line manager and an HR Business Partner, or another manager should be present at the meeting. In advance of the meeting, the line manager should provide the other manager with the information relevant to the team member's case, including:

- the team member's absence record from Dayforce.
- any letters previously sent to the team member about their absence levels, particularly the letter setting out the outcome of the stage 1 short-term sickness absence formal review meeting; and
- any other relevant documentation.

The written invitation to the stage 2 short-term sickness absence formal review meeting should give the team member at least 24 hours' notice of the meeting. The letter should advise the team member who will be present and that the team member can be accompanied by a fellow worker or trade union official.

The letter should explain to the team member that the purpose of the meeting is to review the team member's continued unsatisfactory attendance level. The letter should warn the team member that an outcome of the meeting is that they may be given a second, and final, warning.

The team member's line manager will chair the meeting. An HR Business Partner or other manager will accompany the line manager. A notetaker should be present to take notes of the meeting. The

meeting agenda is contained in the letter inviting the employee to a Stage 2 Sickness Absence Review.

After the meeting, the manager will set out in writing what has been decided because of the stage 2 meeting, for example if a final warning is being issued, or if the decision is that no further action will be taken. The letter, which should be provided to the team member within 5 days of the meeting, should include details of any further steps or targets that have been agreed to help the team member to improve their attendance, and any support that we are providing for the team member.

If a final warning is being issued, this will remain active on the team member's file for a period of 12 months. The letter should give the team member the right to appeal against the warning.

The letter should also include details of any steps or targets that have been agreed to help the team member to improve their attendance, and any support that we are providing for the team member.

The letter should give the team member the right to appeal against the warning.

If during the next 12 months, the team member's sickness absence exceeds these measures, the next stage will be triggered.

#### *No further action*

In limited circumstances, for example if there are extenuating reasons for the absences, the outcome of a stage 2 short-term sickness absence formal review meeting could be that the manager decides that it is not appropriate to move the team member to a third formal review period.

If the decision is that no further action will be taken, the letter should inform the team member of this and provide an explanation for the decision.

### **Stage 3**

The trigger point for a stage 3 final formal review for a team member on a stage 2 formal review period is:

- A further instance of sickness absence during the term of the final warning.
- On reaching a stage 3 trigger point, a different manager will invite the team member in writing to a stage 3 short-term sickness absence final meeting.
- The meeting will be chaired by the manager and the HR Business Partner should be present at the meeting. In advance of the meeting, the line manager should prepare and share with the HR Business Partner:
  - the team member's absence record from Dayforce.
  - any letters previously sent to the team member about their absence levels, particularly the letter setting out the outcome of the stage 2 short-term sickness absence formal review meeting; and
  - any other relevant documentation.

The written invitation to the stage 3 sickness absence formal review meeting should give the team member at least 48 hours' notice of the meeting. The letter should advise the team member who will be present and that the team member can be accompanied by a fellow worker or trade union official.

The letter should explain to the team member that the purpose of the meeting is to review the team member's continued unsatisfactory attendance level while on a stage 2 formal review period.

The letter should warn the team member that a possible outcome of the meeting is that they may be dismissed by reason of capability.

The "stage 3" sickness absence final formal review meeting will be chaired by a senior manager, together with the HR Business Partner. A notetaker should be present to take notes of the meeting. The meeting agenda is contained in the letter inviting the employee to a Stage 3 final sickness absence review.

Within 1 week of the meeting, the manager will set out in writing the outcome of the stage 3 final meeting.

The outcome of the meeting could be:

- a decision to take no further action.
- an offer to make adjustments to the team member's work.
- redeployment with the team member's agreement; or
- a decision to dismiss the team member.

The team member will have a right of appeal. The team member should be informed of their right of appeal in the outcome letter.

## Appeal

A team member who is given a warning or is dismissed under this process has the right of appeal. The appeal should set out the grounds on which the team member believes that the decision was flawed or unfair.

The team member should lodge their appeal within 7 days of receiving written confirmation of the sanction imposed on them by us.

Where possible an appeal hearing will be convened within at least 7 days, after the appeal is lodged.

The team member will be entitled to be accompanied by a fellow team member or a trade union official.

At the hearing, the decision to impose the sanction will be reviewed and the team member will be entitled to make representations about the appropriateness of that decision.

The outcome of the appeal will be confirmed to the team member in writing, explaining the grounds on which the decision was reached. The outcome of the appeal will be final.

## Long Term Sickness Absence

### Scope

This policy covers long-term sickness absence, which is defined as an absence lasting over three weeks.

Where a team member is on long-term sickness absence, but returns to work for short periods, we reserve the right to continue to manage their sickness absence under this policy.

### Keeping in touch

It is important that we maintain contact with a team member on long-term sickness absence to:

- monitor the team member's progress in terms of their return to health.
- support the team member and actively maintain their engagement with us.
- provide information to the team member so that they may make informed decisions (for example, in relation to sick pay entitlement);
- provide practical support from our occupational health advisers.
- encourage a return to work as early as possible.
- facilitate a phased return to work if required, by making appropriate temporary or permanent adjustments; and
- ensure that the team member remains informed about events in the workplace.

It is the joint responsibility of both the line manager and the team member to maintain contact. Once the team member is on long-term sickness absence (i.e., once the team member has reached three weeks and one day continuous absence), the team member's line manager should contact the team member to agree the method and frequency of contact. Contact should be agreed and on a regular basis.

### Home visits

In some circumstances, contact with a team member on long-term sickness absence can be maintained via home visits. Home visits will take place only with the prior consent of the team member at mutually agreed times.

Home visits will be conducted by the team member's line manager or an HR team member. Where the team member is female, at least one of the visitors should always be female. The team member may be accompanied during the visit if they wish, for example by a family member or a team member representative.



If the team member would prefer our representative not to visit them in the home, another location near the team member's home (such as a local cafe or leisure centre) could be mutually agreed.

## Sick pay

Eligible team members are entitled to statutory sick pay (SSP), as detailed above.

Statutory sick pay is payable for up to 28 weeks in any one period of sickness absence, at a weekly rate set by the Government for the relevant tax year.

Towards the end of the 28-week period, the payroll team will notify the team member that the period of SSP will shortly finish. The team member will then receive an SSP1 form which they need to complete to apply for a direct government payment (if eligible).

## Sickness absence management

Line managers must be proactive in managing the absence of a team member on long-term sick leave. The following procedure applies to team members on long-term sickness absence.

The trigger points that are used when a team member is on long-term sickness absence are set out below. When applying these trigger points, the special rules that apply to pregnancy and disability must always be borne in mind. There are also special considerations when ill-health retirement is a possibility, or the team member has a terminal illness.

The stages set out below are guidelines only. There are limited circumstances in which it will be appropriate for a team member to skip straight to the "stage 3" long-term sickness absence final meeting. For example, this could be the case where the medical advice is that the team member will never be able to return to work.

## Remote proceedings

Where it is not possible to hold a face-to-face meeting or hearing under this procedure, we will conduct the process remotely. We will ensure that you and your representative have access to the necessary technology for participating. Your rights will not be affected, and we will ensure that the procedure remains fair and reasonable.

## Occupational health referral

Once a team member has been absent for three weeks and one day, or as soon as it is confirmed that they will be absent for over three weeks (for example, a fit note has signed them off for that period), their manager should contact the HR Team to discuss the possibility of occupational health referral. The company reserves the right to use occupational health at any time during your employment.

## Stage 1

Once a team member has been absent for three weeks and one day, or as soon as it is confirmed that they will be absent for more than three weeks (for example, a fit note has signed them off for that period), their manager should contact the HR Business Partner to set up a "stage 1" long-term sickness absence formal meeting.

The meeting should be with the line manager and an HR representative. The line manager should contact the team member to agree a date, time and location for the meeting to take place, at a time that is convenient for the participants.

If the team member does not respond to efforts made to contact them or does not cooperate with attempts to agree a time and place for the meeting, the line manager is entitled to set a time and place for the meeting without the team member's agreement.

While the meeting can take place in the workplace, it may be that the team member's condition necessitates a venue that is away from the team member's place of work. For example, the team member's mobility may be restricted or a team member suffering from work-related stress may be uncomfortable coming to work. In this case, the meeting can take place in another location. This could be the team member's home (although only if the team member is comfortable with this) or a venue near the team member's home (such as a local cafe or leisure centre).

The line manager should write to the team member inviting them to the "stage 1" long-term sickness absence formal meeting. The team member should be given at least 48 hours' notice of the meeting. The letter should explain to the team member the purpose of the meeting and advise the team member that they can be accompanied by a fellow worker or trade union official.

Notes should be taken at the meeting. During the meeting the line manager will:

- establish how the team member is doing and the potential length of their absence, bearing in mind the advice in the team member's fit note or medical report.
- discuss with the team member what steps can be taken to assist the team member in returning to work (for example, a phased return, amended job duties, altered hours of work, or workplace adaptations).
- explain to the team member their sick pay entitlement, confirm when the next contact will take place (for example, if the team member is undergoing an operation, a reasonable period after the operation has taken place, or once an occupational health report has been actioned).

After the meeting, the line manager will set out in writing what has been discussed at the stage 1 meeting. The letter, which should be provided to the team member within 5 days of the meeting, should include details of any steps or targets that have been agreed to help the team member to return to work, and any support that we are providing for the team member.

## Stage 2

Once the team member is absent for 6 weeks, or as soon as it is confirmed that they will be absent for six weeks (for example, a fit note has signed them off for that period), their line manager should contact the HR Team to set up a "stage 2" long-term sickness absence formal meeting.

Stage 2 long-term sickness absence formal meetings can be repeated if circumstances change or following the advice from an occupational health report. The maximum period a team member should remain on stage 2 is three months.

The meeting should be with the line manager and an HR representative and will follow the same conditions as a Stage 1 invitation regarding any non-cooperation, alternative venue, accompanying person etc.

Notes should be taken at the meeting. During the meeting the line manager will follow the agenda outlined in the template invitation to the meeting letter per Stage 1 meeting above and in addition:

- if it appears that the team member will be unable to return to work, discuss the possibility of dismissal.

After the meeting, the line manager will set out in writing what has been discussed at a stage 2 meeting. The letter, which should be provided to the team member within 5 days of the meeting, should include details of any steps or targets that have been agreed to help the team member to return to work, and any support that we are providing for the team member.

### Stage 3

A Stage 3 long-term sickness absence final meeting will be arranged following the "stage 2" long-term sickness absence process if:

- it is clear from medical advice that the team member is unable to return to their role in the foreseeable future.
- all reasonable steps to assist the team member in returning to work (for example, a phased return, amended job duties, altered hours of work, or workplace adaptations) have been exhausted; or
- the possibility of dismissal has been discussed with the team member.

A Stage 3 long-term sickness absence final meeting will also be arranged once a team member has had a three-month continuous absence period, or as soon as it is confirmed that the continuous absence period will last for at least three months (for example, a fit note or occupational health report has indicated the team member will be off for a period that will take them beyond three months' continuous absence).

The meeting should be with an impartial manager and an HR representative. The line manager should provide the manager with all relevant information relating to the case including the notes of previous meetings.

The team member should be given at least 48 hours' notice of the meeting. The letter should explain to the team member the purpose of the meeting and advise the team member that they can be accompanied by a fellow worker or trade union official. The letter should warn the team member that a possible outcome of the meeting is that they may be dismissed by reason of capability.

Notes should be taken at the meeting. During the meeting the senior manager will consider all the circumstances of the team member's case, including:

- the length of the team member's absence and the likely length of future absence.
- medical advice on the team member's condition.
- what adjustments are available to help the team member to return to work; and
- the effect of the team member's continued absence on their colleagues and department.

After the meeting, the manager will set out in writing the outcome of the stage 3 meeting. The outcome of the meeting could be:

- a decision for the team member to remain on sick leave until they have recovered (typically where an approximate return date can be identified within the next 30 days).
- an offer to make adjustments to the team member's work.
- redeployment with the team member's agreement; or
- a decision to dismiss the team member.

Where possible, an outcome letter should be provided to the team member within 7 days of the meeting where possible.

## Appeal

A team member who is given a warning or is dismissed under this procedure has the right of appeal as detailed above.

## Return-to-work arrangements

We will always arrange a return-to-work meeting for a team member returning from long-term sickness absence.

When the team member returns to work, the team member's line manager should arrange to reintroduce the team member back into the workplace and ensure that arrangements are made to support the team member on their return. These arrangements should include any agreed adjustments and, where necessary, a risk assessment including:

- a phased return to work
- temporary reassignment (normally lasting no longer than 3 months)
- permanent redeployment

## Special cases





## **Pregnancy-related absences and Disability-related absences**

Please see above in short term sickness section.

## **Terminal illness**

Where a team member is suffering from a terminal illness, we will endeavour as far as possible to accommodate their wishes.

While we will support team members who wish to continue working, team members with a terminal illness should bear in mind that there may come a time when they will be unable to continue working. In this case, the team member's line manager will discuss the options with the team member, with the support of the HR Team.

Terminally ill team members who choose to continue working should bear in mind that, while there is no obligation to inform us or any of their colleagues about the illness, it is normally better to do so to allow the proper support to be provided.

Cove UK provides an employee assistance programme to assist during this difficult time.