

No. 119/2020

Ref: DJ/ML

Date: 12 March 2020

## TO ALL BRANCHES WITH BT MEMBERS

Dear Colleague

### BT PERSONNEL - Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Update

Further to LTB 110/2020, consultation is continuing with the company of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation. Below are the recent updates from BT on the issue of sickness attendance, self-isolation, attendance triggers, manager's guidance, and annual leave carry over:

- self-isolation absence won't be treated as sickness
- sickness absence due to coronavirus diagnosis won't count towards absence triggers (this is due to the exceptional circumstances around the coronavirus)
- an additional question added to people manager FAQs regarding triggers
- an additional question added to bottom of people manager FAQs regarding exceptional leave carry-over requests as a result of cancelled holidays in March

Please find attached the latest FAQs.

Any enquiries from Branches regarding this LTB should be referred to my office in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

**Dave Jukes**  
Assistant Secretary

Att:



Reward Policy  
Coronavirus question

## Reward Policy related questions

### 1. I've been diagnosed with Coronavirus what policy applies?

This will be treated as sickness absence and you're covered by normal sickness policy and procedures as set out in your terms and conditions. The policies can be found [here](#)

Exceptionally, BT will not take formal action against an employee for sickness absence due to a formal diagnosis of coronavirus, provided that the employee has provided evidence of their diagnosis and provided that they have not travelled to an area designated as inadvisable by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Public Health England (PHE) or the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO). Please note that our systems do not currently have the capability to record coronavirus separately to other absences, and therefore cases may still be automatically referred for consideration, however we will issue instructions to people managers to disregard any coronavirus absence when considering absence levels.

### 2. I'm currently in or have returned from a high-risk area (identified in government guidance) and although I don't have any symptoms, I can't come to work as I'm under enforced quarantine/ need to self-isolate as per Public Health England (PHE) guidelines -what happens?

BT will exercise its discretion to continue to pay you in full for the duration of the isolation period as defined in government guidance upon receipt of evidence that proves self-isolation is necessary (as outlined below). This won't be counted as sickness absence. You may be asked to provide additional information if the isolation period lasts longer than 14 days. We want to ensure that colleagues who shouldn't come into work don't, to contain any risk of spreading disease which could have health and safety implications for the rest of the workforce.

If you can work from home, in these circumstances you absolutely should do so. If you're still abroad, please get in touch with your line manager as there may be tax / visa issues preventing you from doing this and you may not have the right set up to do this in line with BT Security conditions. You should **not** go into a nearby BT office to work during this time.

If you ignored advice/ restrictions in place from the World Health Organisation (WHO)/Public Health England (PHE) / Foreign Commonwealth office (FCO) before travelling, we'll not pay you for this period.

### 3. I'm currently in or have returned from a high-risk area (identified in government guidance) and although I don't have any symptoms, I can't come to work as I'm under enforced quarantine/ need to self-isolate as per Public Health England (PHE) guidelines. Due to the nature of my job I can't work from home (e.g. Openreach engineers/Retail etc.) - what happens?

BT will exercise its discretion to continue to pay you in full for the duration of the isolation period as defined in government guidance upon receipt of evidence that proves self-isolation is necessary (as outlined below) upon receipt of evidence that proves self-isolation is necessary (as outlined below). This won't be counted as sickness absence. You may be

asked to provide additional information if the isolation period lasts longer than 14 days. We want to ensure that colleagues who shouldn't come into work don't, to contain any risk of spreading disease which could have health and safety implications for the rest of the workforce.

If you ignored advice/ restrictions in place the World Health Organisation (WHO)/Public Health England (PHE) / Foreign Commonwealth office before travelling, we'll not pay you for this period.

- 4. I'm currently in or have returned from a high-risk area (identified in government guidance) and am under enforced quarantine/need to self-isolate, but I'd travelled there against advice/restrictions in place from the World Health Organisation (WHO)/Public Health England (PHE) / Foreign Commonwealth office (FCO) what happens?**

BT will not pay you for this period. BT policy is to exclude anyone who has deliberately travelled to a location against WHO/PHE guidance and therefore could have avoided the need to self- isolate/enforced quarantine. This won't be counted as sickness absence.

- 5. I need to self-isolate because someone I live with is in self isolation, or I have been in contact with someone diagnosed with the virus – what happens?**

BT will exercise its discretion to continue to pay you in full for the duration of the isolation period as defined in government guidance upon receipt of evidence that proves self-isolation is necessary (as outlined below). This won't be counted as sickness absence. You may be asked to provide additional information if the isolation period lasts longer than 14 days. We want to ensure that colleagues who shouldn't come into work don't, to contain any risk of spreading disease which could have health and safety implications for the rest of the workforce.

- 6. I'm worried/scared about coming into work but have no connection or reason to believe that I may have Coronavirus – what happens?**

BT has no obligation to allow paid time off for this so we would expect you to carry out your job as normal in your normal place of work (office/ contact centre/ retail shop/Openreach engineers etc.) You should discuss any fears you have with your manager about attendance at work. Unreasonable refusal to attend work will be dealt with in line with BT's discipline policy.

There is a lot of useful information on how to protect yourself on the BT coronavirus intranet <https://hr.bt.com/en-gb/safety-wellbeing/health-alerts/coronavirus-guidance/coronavirus-faqs>

- 7. I'm abroad and am under enforced quarantine/need to self-isolate can I work from here?**

Please get in touch with your line manager as there may be tax / visa issues preventing you from doing this and you may not have the right set up to do this in line with BT Security conditions. You should **not** go into a nearby BT office to work during this time.

**8. My personal travel and therefore return to work have been delayed due to coronavirus travel restrictions what happens?**

There's guidance in place to provide 2 additional days paid leave for colleagues in this scenario. There's no legal requirement to offer paid leave in this situation but we think it's fair to do this. If you're under enforced quarantine or required to self-isolate different conditions apply, please see above.

**9. As a People manager one of my team has turned up for work despite being in a category where isolation has been recommended. What happens?**

You should send them home on full pay to ensure there is no risk to other colleagues. For the health and safety of the individual and colleagues please see this flow chart to help you with decision making:

[https://hr.bt.com/en-global/Documents/All/Safety\\_wellbeing/Health/Coronavirus\\_guidance\\_flow\\_chart.pdf](https://hr.bt.com/en-global/Documents/All/Safety_wellbeing/Health/Coronavirus_guidance_flow_chart.pdf)

**10. As a People manager, if someone becomes unwell in the workplace and has travelled to China or other affected high-risk countries, what should I do?**

The unwell person should be removed to an area;

- Which is at least 2 metres away from other people. If possible, find a room or area where they can be isolated behind a closed door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation.
- The individual who is unwell should call NHS 111 from their mobile, or 999 if an emergency (if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk) and explain which country they have returned from in the last 14 days and outline their current symptoms.
- Whilst they wait for advice from NHS 111 or an ambulance to arrive, they should remain at least 2 metres from other people.
- They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag or pocket then throw the tissue in the bin.
- If they don't have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow.
- If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, they should use a separate bathroom if available.

**11. Do I need a fit note for self-isolation/enforced quarantine?**

Due to the circumstances we're relaxing our normal rules around requiring fit notes, as doctors may be reluctant to see patients who potentially have coronavirus. We may however ask you to provide evidence to support the need for self-isolation – for example travel documentation/notices or test results. You may be asked to provide additional information if the isolation period lasts longer than 14 days

If you or an immediate family member have been tested for Coronavirus, we may also ask you to provide copies of the test results.

**12. I've got a child/children whose nurseries/schools are closed due to coronavirus and therefore need additional time off to look after them. What happens?**

Normal policies apply for having time off to look after children or other dependents and you should consult with your line manager as you would normally in these circumstances. See links below

[Parental leave policy](#)

[Special leave policy](#)

**13. My holiday planned for March 2020 has been cancelled due to Coronavirus. I no longer want to take the leave in March but don't want to lose it at the end of the holiday year, can I carry this over to next year?**

You're able to carry over up to one working week and this will be done automatically for you at the beginning of April. If it's practical to do so, you should still take any additional leave before the end of March but if you want to carry over more than one week of leave, you'll need to apply through the exceptional carry over process and this will need approval from your line manager in the usual way.

BT reserves the right to withdraw, review and/or amend these arrangements in view of changing circumstances and new guidance.

**Questions for people manager section**

**Q: As a people manager, what should I be advising colleagues who ask to take time off to look after children whose schools/nurseries have closed due to coronavirus (and are not being asked to self-isolate)?**

A for main HR FAQs: Refer to People Manager guidance ([INSERT LINK](#))

A for People manager section: Normal policies apply for having time off to look after children or other dependents including annual leave, unpaid parental leave or special leave (unpaid/paid/combination of both). There is no legal requirement to pay in these circumstances however as a people manager you should consider such requests taking into account the individual circumstances. It can be very helpful to put yourself in the position of the person requesting the leave and you can take into consideration anything you feel is relevant, some suggestions of questions you may ask are as follows...

Is there anybody else that could help them with their childcare requirements?

The age and ability of the child

Is it possible for them to work from home (bearing in mind their childcare responsibilities there)?

How much time off has been taken off previously for childcare reasons?

How long is being requested?

**Q: As a people manager, one of my colleagues is worried/scared about coming into work but has no connection or reason to believe that they may have Coronavirus – what should I advise?**

A for main HR FAQs: Refer to People Manager guidance ([INSERT LINK](#))

A for people manager section: BT has no obligation to allow paid time off for this so we would normally expect them to carry out their job as normal in their normal place of work (office/ contact centre/ retail shop/Openreach engineers etc). If the colleague has specific fears/concerns eg an underlying health condition, you should consider their circumstances and whether there are any adjustments that could be made (eg work from home/annual leave/unpaid leave). In exceptional circumstances only you may use your discretion to approve paid special leave but this shouldn't be the norm. Unreasonable refusal to attend work will be dealt with in line with BT's discipline policy.

**Q: Someone in my team has had their March 2020 holiday cancelled at short notice due to coronavirus, and is asking to carry over the leave as exceptional carry over – what should I advise?**

A: Colleagues are able to carry over up to one working week and this will be done automatically. If they want to carry over more than one week of leave, they'll need to apply through the exceptional carry over process which needs your approval. As a people manager you should consider such requests taking into account the individual circumstances and you can take into consideration anything you feel is relevant, some suggestions are...

How much leave is the colleague already carrying over?

Have they made exceptional carry over requests in previous years?

Can it be demonstrated that this is the reason for their request?

Was there another practical opportunity for them to take the leave before the end of the holiday year?

**Q: Should sickness absence due to coronavirus be disregarded when considering absence levels in terms of triggering formal action.**

A: Yes. Exceptionally, BT won't take formal action against an employee for sickness absence due to a formal diagnosis of coronavirus, provided that the employee has provided evidence of their diagnosis and provided that they have not travelled to an area designated as inadvisable by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Public Health England (PHE) or the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO). Please note that our systems do not currently have the capability to record coronavirus separately to other absences, and therefore cases may still be automatically referred for consideration, but you should disregard any coronavirus absence when considering absence levels.