

# Sickness Absence Toolkit

Proactive & Preventative  
approach to wellbeing

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# Toolkit Overview & Purpose

## **Toolkit purpose**

Supports NHS managers and HR teams to:

- lead confident conversations that prioritise staff wellbeing
- focus on prevention to help staff stay healthy and reduce sickness absence
- bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring conversations are compassionate and staff feel heard

## **Guidance and Process**

Provides practical advice on prevention, management and return-to-work processes for sickness absence

## **Preventative and Compassionate Approach**

Encourages a shift from reactive to proactive strategies, fostering compassion and compliance

## **Promoting Positive and Supportive Culture**

Offers structured resources to maintain consistency in handling sickness cases while supporting staff retention and patient safety

# Why it matters - impact of Sickness Absence



## Financial Impact

Sickness absence costs the NHS billions annually, affecting financial sustainability



## Impact on Staff Member

Worry, fear and isolation can occur when off sick. We know illness happens - this is about preventing avoidable sickness and supporting a safe return to work



## Health causes of absence

Mental health issues such as stress, and anxiety, along with musculoskeletal issues are leading causes of staff sickness absence in the NHS



## Operational Impact

Increased pressure on remaining staff, leading to higher workloads and overtime. Disruption of service delivery and longer patient waits



## Team Dynamics and Culture

Reduced team cohesion and collaboration, increasing the risk of workplace conflict due to stress and workload imbalance



## Workforce Capacity & Patient Care

Leads to staff burnout, lowered morale, presenteeism, retention challenges, longer waiting times, delayed treatments and compromises patient safety

Aligned with the People Promise, 10-Year Health Plan, Keeping Britain Working, and CQC priorities.

# What's new in the refresh



**All you need to know  
in 30 seconds**



- **Lifecycle approach**

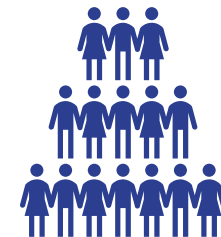
- prevention first
- early intervention
- management and return to work plans

**Next steps:** reframe as 'Stay at Work' plans (part of Keep Britain Working initiative)


- **Compassionate leadership principles** - wellbeing conversation guides to help managers lead with empathy
- **Practical tools include:**
  - Manager checklists to support consistent processes
  - More direct links to useful resources for quick access
- **Quick reference section:**
  - 'All you need to know in 30 seconds'
- **Trade union and Partnership Information & Resources** with guidance and key links

# Developed through collaborative partnership

- **NHS stakeholders**
- **NHS Employers Staff Experience network**
- **Occupational Health teams**
- **Union colleagues**
- **NHS organisation staff networks**
- **NHS England colleagues**
- **Internal colleagues**



# Access the toolkit & resources


 **NHS Employers**

Home / Resources

Toolkit

## Sickness Absence Toolkit

Guidance for NHS managers to have supportive conversations around sickness absence.



Scan for Toolkit

NHS England –  
Sickness Absence Data  
upto July 2025 - 5.1%



<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-sickness-absence-rates>

Access the full toolkit and supporting resources on the NHS Employers website - [NHS Employers](#)