

Your Questions Answered – 18 March

Below is some of the questions we've received from staff regarding our response to COVID-19. We'll share more answers to questions as soon as we can so keep sending them in to using the [online form](#) (intranet only) or to Communications.Team@wales.nhs.uk Title your email STAFF QUESTION.

Please note these answers are correct as of 18 March 2020.

1. What is the guidance on the use of Annual Leave? If I've booked Easter off do I cancel it in ESR?
If you have pre-booked leave and have not cancelled it to provide support to the response then you can continue to take your leave as planned. If however, your planned leave coincides with a period of self-isolation then, following discussion with your line manager, this leave can be cancelled and reinstated.
2. Do agency workers fall under the same protection as staff directly employed by Public Health Wales?
An agency worker will need to complete a 12 week qualifying period to be able to receive some of the same protections as staff directly employed by PHW. Specific queries should be directed to the People Support team.
3. Recording absences related to Coronavirus in ESR
It has been agreed that any self-isolation absence (whether with symptoms or without), which is taken following UK/Welsh Government advice in the interests of infection control, will be treated as medical exclusion. In these circumstances, colleagues will not be required to provide a Fit Note as the absence is considered authorised with full pay. Absence as a result of coronavirus will not count towards the prompts outlined in the Managing Attendance at Work policy and employees will be paid in full. Any planned annual leave which coincides with this period of self-isolation will be reinstated. For full details of how to accurately record in ESR any period of absence related to Coronavirus please see the guidance here:
<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/phw-staff-your-questions-answered/>
4. Risk Assessment for vulnerable groups in critical roles
In line with current UK Government guidance, we have developed a risk assessment (link to document) form for managers and staff to help in making decisions on arrangements for colleagues who are:
 1. In a group identified as vulnerable/at risk, and
 2. Performing business critical roles

As part of this, managers are asked to consider:

- Any UK Government guidance relating to that group, i.e. pregnant women, colleagues over 70
- Their usual environment and proximity to other colleagues and/or service users
- How they travel to and from work, and adjustments that may be advisable
- How their duties and responsibilities could be re-distributed

5. Can you clarify the use of VPN for staff who aren't considered to be business critical?

The VPN system serves the whole of the NHS in Wales and if all users worked from home during normal office hours it would cause capacity issues. Therefore we have to prioritise users who are working on our response to COVID-19. Our advice to those staff members currently at home and not working on COVID-19 is change the way you work to accommodate this enhanced demand. It is suggested that staff log on at set times of the day to download emails and send responses and work offline otherwise.

6. What is considered a Business Critical Function?

The HR guidance recognises the following functions as being business critical:

- Microbiology
- Health Protection
- Informatics
- Communications
- Estates
- Finance
- Local Public Health Teams supporting the health board response to COVID-19
- Parts of Screening
- People & Organisational Development