

Being off sick: your obligations

The majority of schools in the maintained sector adapt their local authority's guidelines for the reporting of sickness absence and contact with the school whilst off sick, but often staff are unsure of these guidelines. Colleges and independent schools will generally have their own policies. This ATL factsheet answers some of the most common questions asked by members. However, you should always check your contract and any local procedures or guidance too.

This factsheet should be read in conjunction with factsheet ADV2: *Sick leave and sick pay: your entitlements*.

What do I do if I am unable to attend work due to illness?

Your school or college policy may require you to ring in by a certain time in the morning. It should also state who you must contact. The time is likely to be before the start of the school or college day so may be quite early. You will be required to ring in yourself, unless you are too ill to do so, in which case you should ask someone to ring in on your behalf as soon as possible.

What happens if I ring in late or don't ring in at all?

You will need to explain why you rang in late, eg if you are admitted to hospital or you are too ill to get out of bed. If you do not ring in this may be judged as unauthorised absence, which could lead to disciplinary action against you and/or you losing pay for each day you do not inform your employer of your absence.

What should I do if I'm going to be off sick for more than one day?

You will be expected to indicate how long you think you may be off, when you will next be in contact and what work you have pending at school or college. This applies to short- and long-term absences. You must obtain a medical certificate for your absence — and ensure your employer receives it — if you are off sick for more than seven calendar days. You will be required to complete a self-certificate upon your return to work for absences of seven days or less (this practice may be different with some private employers).

After I have notified my school or college that I am off sick, should they contact me again?

No, not unless you agree to it. You should be left to recover and you will have already stated when you will next be in touch. There should therefore be no need for your employer to contact you unless exceptional circumstances arise.

I have been contacted and asked to do some marking/set work whilst I'm off sick. Should I agree?

No. You should not carry out any work duties whilst off sick and you should not be contacted without prior agreement. Contact your ATL representative or branch secretary if this happens.

Schools and colleges should have arrangements in place to provide pre-prepared, appropriate work for pupils in the event of short-term absence as well as cover for your absence. Again, contact your ATL representative if such arrangements are not in place.

Are there activities I should and should not do whilst off sick?

You should do only what your current state of health allows. During sick leave, you should not be employed elsewhere and should not exercise away from home unless it is part of your recovery. Sick leave should not be used to attend job interviews. Your employer may take a dim view, and possible disciplinary action against you, if they become aware of any activities that are inconsistent with your sick leave.

I'm having an operation and consequently will be on long-term sickness absence. What should I do?

Inform your school or college as soon as possible of this. You may be asked to provide evidence of your upcoming operation and/or expected period of absence. You may also be asked to set work in advance before you go on sick absence. However, this must not add significantly to your current workload. Your doctor should provide you with a 'fit to return to work' certificate before you go back to work. You may wish to consider, in advance, applying for a phased return to work, ie shorter hours with a reduced workload for a planned period after your return. Any agreement varying your contract should be confirmed in writing.

I have been asked to attend a medical referral or examination with the occupational health service. Should I attend?

Yes. If your employer has concerns regarding your health, they may have the right to request your attendance at a medical referral or examination and should pay for all costs and travel related to it. (If you work in the independent sector or at a college, please check your contract as to your entitlement to reimbursement of these expenses.) You will have the right to a copy of the medical report. You may be asked to attend a meeting thereafter to discuss its contents.

I have an infectious disease/share a house with someone who has an infectious disease. What should I do?

If you have an infectious disease you should telephone and inform your school or college and then obtain a medical certificate confirming the position. If someone in your house has an infectious disease, ring in and seek guidance, as you may be asked not to attend your workplace. You should receive full pay if you are instructed to remain off work for this reason.



Need advice?

Your first point of contact is your ATL rep in your school or college. Your local ATL branch is also available to help with queries, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on **020 7930 6441**, email: info@atl.org.uk or write to 7 Northumberland Street, London WC2N 5RD. Don't forget you can also get lots of help and advice, as well as download copies of other ATL advice sheets, on our website at www.atl.org.uk

© Association of Teachers and Lecturers 2007. All rights reserved. Information on this sheet may be reproduced or quoted with proper acknowledgement to the Association.