

*“Due to illness, the shop will be closed until further notice.”*

Illness among key employees can cause you serious problems. As well as employees suffering work-related illnesses, your business could be seriously disrupted by common infections such as flu. You may have to suspend production or services and lose business unless you make arrangements for replacement staff to cover unexpected absences. Absences can place an extra burden on your remaining staff, which may put them at a higher risk of injury or illness.

Obviously, you're not able to prevent your employees from contracting non work-related illnesses. However, you have a duty to protect them from work-related illnesses. There are many types of work-related ill health, for example, musculoskeletal disorders, stress-related illness, noise-induced hearing loss.

You may have some employees who are more vulnerable to workplace hazards than others, for example pregnant women, younger or older people, or those with disabilities. In a small business, the owner or a key employee could be among this group.

## Tips

- Your workplace and work conditions can be improved through co-operation and the principle 'look after yourself and your co-workers'.
- Use average absence figures for your sector as a benchmark when assessing your absence levels. If you're a member of a trade or employer's association, they might be able to give you average absence data.

## Useful links

Department for Work and Pensions – Health, work and wellbeing  
[www.dwp.gov.uk/welfare-reform/health.asp](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfare-reform/health.asp)

Health and Safety Executive – Best practice case studies  
[www.hse.gov.uk/sh2/casestudies.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/sh2/casestudies.htm)

British Heart Foundation – Think fit  
[www.bhf.org.uk/thinkfit](http://www.bhf.org.uk/thinkfit)

NHS Health at Work  
[www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/](http://www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/)