



Serious Viral Epidemic or Pandemic Policy	
Latest Review: February 2024	Next Review: February 2025
<p>Compliance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Social Care Act 2008 • The Food Hygiene Regulations 2006 • The Health & Safety at Work Act 1975 	
<p>Associated Policies:</p> <p>Infection Control Health & Safety COSSH First Aid PPE Waste Management Cleaning & Laundry</p>	
<p>1. INTRODUCTION</p> <p>Some infections such as some strains of influenza, SARs or the Coronavirus are highly infectious viral illnesses that have the capacity to spread rapidly. When a new viral strain emerges, one of the following situations may occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A serious epidemic - where a disease infects a significantly greater number of people in the area than is usual, or • A pandemic – which is an epidemic of global proportions <p>Such an illness will spread rapidly because people will not have any natural resistance to it. It is difficult to predict the scale, severity and impact of a serious epidemic or pandemic, but research suggests that in the case of a pandemic, it could affect the entire country and that up to half the population could develop the illness. There could also be more than one wave of the illness.</p> <p>During a serious viral epidemic or pandemic, Assist Trust’s overall aim will be to encourage staff [and volunteers] to carry on as normal if they are well, while taking additional precautions to protect them from exposure to infection and to lessen the risk of spread to others.</p> <p>In terms of business continuity, this means that we will seek to sustain our core business and services as far as is practicable and therefore we will continue to operate largely within the existing framework of policies and procedures. However, we recognise that during such times some additional provisions will be required to support staff and volunteers.</p>	

2. During a Serious Epidemic or Pandemic

During a recognised viral epidemic or pandemic, Assist Trust will implement the following provisions:

2.1 Communications:

Regular communications, guidance, information and support will be made available from the Chief Executive and managers via email, telephone or during handover / meetings. Staff should monitor these sources closely to stay up to date with what is happening within the workplace, what action is being taken to ensure Assist Trust meets its obligations to staff, volunteers, members and other stakeholders and what action staff themselves should be taking.

2.2 Additional Hygiene Arrangements:

In line with Government and Department of Health guidelines Assist Trust will provide, handwashing facilities, handwash soap, antibacterial sanitiser (when available) and tissues located throughout its premises and staff will be encouraged and reminded to use these regularly.

All surfaces, door handles, banister rails, telephones, computer keyboards etc. will be cleaned frequently and staff are encouraged to undertake this in their own work area on a daily basis.

All waste bins will be emptied daily.

Staff and volunteers will be encouraged and reminded to always use clean tissues or the crook of their elbow to cover their mouth / nose when they cough / sneeze (not to use their hands, a cloth handkerchief or to re-use tissues) and to wash / sanitise their hands regularly and specifically after coughing or sneezing.

2.3 Visitors

In public-facing areas Assist Trust will provide antibacterial sanitiser (when available), disposable tissues and covered bins for public use, staff to encourage the public to use these items.

3. Staff or volunteers with symptoms / positive Covid test results

Government guidance over the management of situations where staff members have symptoms or test positive for Covid changed very regularly during the time of the pandemic.

The Assist Trust responded to this guidance accordingly, reviewing its own organisational risk assessment in relation to all Covid related measures and precautions.

The Assist Trust Covid 19 Risk Assessment has therefore been reviewed and adjusted on a regular basis and individuals should refer to the current version of this document for detailed instructions on the following:

- Social distancing
- Mask wearing
- Testing regimes
- Hygiene precautions
- Ventilation guidance
- Self-isolation guidance

4. Entitlement to Sick Pay – During Coronavirus Outbreak

If an employee has been told by a medical professional, NHS 111 to self-isolate or is confirmed to having Coronavirus.

The current advice from the Government is that if NHS 111 or a doctor advises you to self-isolate, you are entitled to Statutory Sick Pay. This will be paid in line with current Government guidance. This includes individuals who may be a carrier of COVID-19 who may not have symptoms. Assist Trust will use its discretion around the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to self-isolate in the current exceptional circumstances. Employees can self-certify for the first 7 days as per normal. [Assist Trust's contractual sick pay will operate as normal and as detailed in your contract of employment.]

5. Staff Who Have Difficulty Attending Work (where they don't have symptoms) – due to Coronavirus

In general staff have no right to refuse to attend work during an epidemic / pandemic unless there is a clear health and safety risk. Their employment contract will oblige them to carry out their normal duties and refusal to do so may put them in breach of their contract. However Assist Trust is aware that certain situations can occur and these will be dealt with on a case by case basis:

5.1 Public transport is shut down

Where an employee has difficulty getting to work because of a failure in the public transport system due to the epidemic / pandemic, they will be encouraged to seek other methods of getting to work. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible for some staff to work from home during this period of difficulty, to vary their start and end times, or to take annual or unpaid leave. Employees will not be paid if they fail to turn up for work and should discuss options with the HR Manager and their line manager as soon as possible.

- 5.2 The employee reports that a member of their household has been diagnosed with the illness but that they themselves are OK and would be willing to attend work

Assist Trust recognises it has a duty of care to its workforce and the individual will be advised to remain at home until the ill relative/themselves are no longer infectious. However Assist Trust may wish to discuss the possibility of the employee working from home. Under these circumstances the employee will receive their full pay as if they had been working normally. If the employee is unable to work from home, then they may be encouraged to take annual or unpaid leave.

- 5.3 The employee reports that their child or other dependant has the illness and they are unable to arrange care at short-notice:

Under these circumstances Assist Trust recognises that the employee has a statutory right to a reasonable period of unpaid time off to care for these dependants. This is limited to sufficient time off to deal with the immediate issue and to sort-out short-term caring arrangements; the individual should discuss their situation with the Head of HR and their line manager. In these circumstances, Assist Trust will allow a reasonable amount of unpaid time off to be taken. However if the sick individual is a member of the employee's household then the provisions of 5.2 above would apply. See Assist Trust's 'Time off for Dependents Policy' which can be found in Assist Trust offices.

- 5.4 The employee asks not to attend work because of fear of contracting illness:

The employee is contractually bound to attend work, and not doing so in these circumstances may be dealt with through Assist Trust disciplinary procedures. However, it should be understood that this is an exceptional event and Assist Trust will take reasonable action dependent on the degree of risk.

- 5.5 The employee has school-age children and the school is closed due to the epidemic / pandemic:

The provisions of 5.3 above would apply

- 5.6 If an employee is not sick but ASSIST TRUST tells them not to come to work as a precaution

If an employee is not sick but Assist Trust tells them not to come to work, they may be asked to work from home, but in all cases will be paid their normal pay.

6. Working flexibly

The impact of any epidemic / pandemic will normally mean an increased workload due to a reduction in the actual staff available for work. It will therefore be essential that we maximise the capacity of our available workforce by asking staff to work more flexibly and /or differently. Therefore Assist Trust reserves the right to ask staff to undertake one or more of the following options:

- work additional hours to cover for sick colleagues
- work more flexibly as required
- work in a different job role for a period (with appropriate training)
- work from an alternative location, or even from home if appropriate
- cancel planned annual leave

The use of these flexible work practices will vary depending on the seriousness of the staff shortages and the needs of the business at that time. Staff will be paid based on the additional hours and responsibilities they undertake.

7.0 Using annual leave

Assist Trust's annual leave policy applies.

If staff have annual leave authorised for a holiday but are unable to travel either because their destination is a restricted area as identified by the Government or through personal choice, then they can request to work over the proposed leave period and that their leave be reinstated. Approval of this request is at the discretion of the line manager.

[Both line managers and staff are reminded of the restrictions that apply at the end of year to the number of annual leave days that can be carried to the following year i.e. 5 days for full-time staff and normal weekly working hours for part time staff. Any annual leave remaining untaken above these limits at year end will be lost.]

8.0 Post Epidemic/Pandemic Considerations

After the first wave of such an illness Assist Trust acknowledges that staff will need time to completely recover their full fitness and performance levels. Managers will ensure that staff who had been asked to work extended hours, or were denied their planned leave are given annual leave or TOIL where at all possible. However, the possibility of subsequent waves has to be kept in mind and Assist Trust will discuss with staff the lessons learnt from the current epidemic / pandemic and continue with preparations required to cope with subsequent waves.

Signed and Authorised by:

Name:

Role:

Date:

Name:

Role:

Date: