How to Manage Absence in the 'New Normal'

What is the 'new normal'?

- A virtual world
- Working from home
- Increased flexible working
- Decreased social contact
- Self-isolation
- Social distancing
- PPE
- Regular testing

What problems has it brought?

- Health concerns
- Furlough
- Decreased job security
- School closures
- Industry 'closures'
- Financial hardship
- Social isolation

Associated Risks

- Risk of infection / illness

- Deterioration of physical health

- Increased anxiety and depression

- Increased substance abuse

- Burnout

Illness when working from home

- Very tempting / easy to work through an illness

- Difficult to ever 'switch-off' from work

- With no commute, and being able to work from your bed, the threshold for 'being ill' feels higher

- How do you know you need a break for mental health reasons?

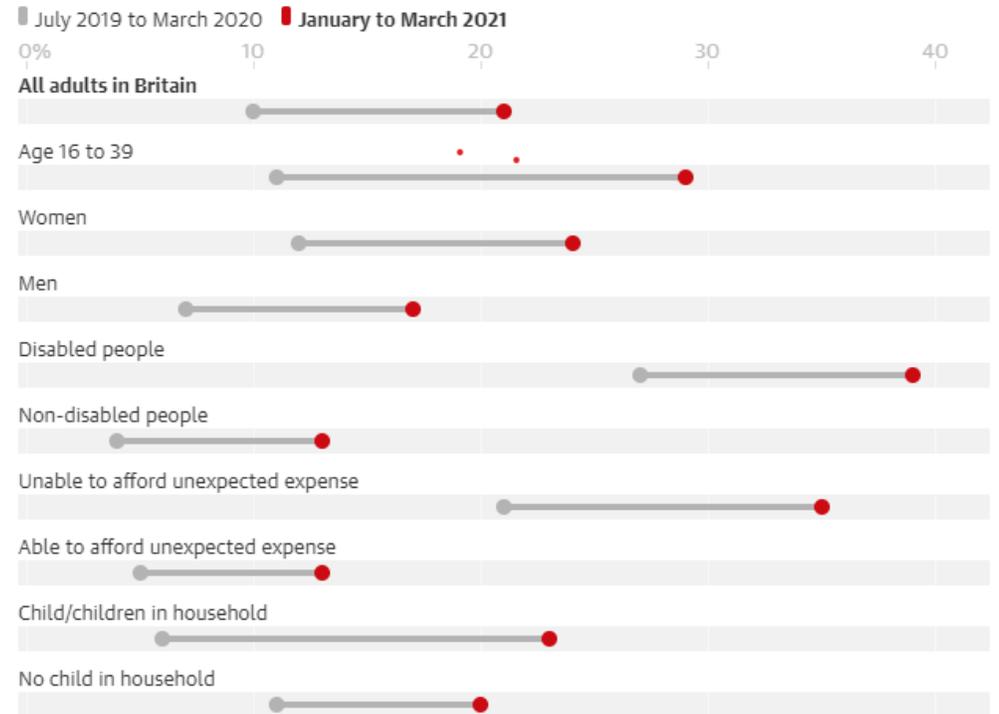- Employees able to justify taking a day off for mental health reasons?

What do the stats say?

- During the pandemic, about [4 in 10](#) adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, a share that has been largely consistent, up from [one in ten](#) adults who reported these symptoms from January to June 2019 (Figure 1)

- A [poll](#) from July 2020 also found that many adults are reporting specific negative impacts on their mental health and well-being, such as difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic conditions (12%), due to worry and stress over the coronavirus

What do the stats say?

- The figures, based on the [ONS's Opinions and Lifestyle survey](#), show that between January and March 2021, during the second lockdown, 21% of adults experienced some form of depression, more than double the figure observed before the pandemic.

One in five adults in Britain experienced depressive symptoms in early 2021, more than double the proportion before the pandemic

July 2019 to March 2020 ■ January to March 2021

All adults in Britain
Age 16 to 39
Women
Men
Disabled people
Non-disabled people
Unable to afford unexpected expense
Able to afford unexpected expense
Child/children in household
No child in household

Guardian graphic | Source: ONS opinions and lifestyle survey – Covid-19 module

What do the stats say?

- Nationally, in England, models predict that up to 10 million people (almost 20% of the population) will need either new or additional mental health support as a direct consequence of the crisis. 1.5 million of those will be children and young people under 18.

- Over 200,000 NHS workers may need treatment for: post-traumatic distress (36,996), high psychological distress (120,372) and burnout (81,499).

- Among people who have not experienced mental ill health prior to the pandemic, demand for services is forecast at 1.33 million people for moderate-severe anxiety and 1.82 million for moderate to severe depression. This figure is based on research on the impact of enforced isolation due to Covid-19 (Fancourt et al., 2020).

Absence due to Long-COVID

- About 1 in 4 COVID-19 patients will suffer from long-term symptoms

- Seriously harms quality of life, mental health, work performance, general wellbeing

- Still know very little about the long term effects of the infection

- Questions left unanswered
  - How long will it last?
  - When will you be back to 'normal'?
  - When will you return to work?
  - How will you return to work?

Symptoms of long COVID

- extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- shortness of breath
- chest pain or tightness
- problems with memory and concentration ("brain fog")
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- heart palpitations
- dizziness
- pins and needles
- joint pain
- depression and anxiety
- tinnitus, earaches
- feeling sick, diarrhoea, stomach aches, loss of appetite
- a high temperature, cough, headaches, sore throat, changes to sense of smell or taste
- rashes

How to manage 'remote' absences?

- Keep regular contact
- Be supportive
- Encourage vaccination
- Be sensitive to differing home conditions
- Understand people's worries and anxieties
- Know the rules (self-isolation)
- Learn to recognise the signs of burnout
- Introduce phased returns to work
- Flexible working patterns

Remote Performance Management

- **In 2020 68% of remote employees had lost interest in working hard.**

- Regular Catch-ups

- Opportunity for feedback

- Clear communication channels

- Give recognition

- Offer support

- Set goals and targets

- Emphasis on output not presenteeism