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Managing World Cup Fever

Football fever is about to hit the nation with the World Cup running from 9 June until 9 July.

While the World Cup brings excitement for individuals throughout the nation it also brings a headache for employers who suffer high rates of sickness absence throughout the duration of the World Cup. Here we examine the steps that employers should take to manage World Cup fever effectively.

First and foremost, employers should make sure that they have a reliable and workable method for recording sickness absence in place. Records should show who has been absent, for how long they have been absent on each occasion, and the reason for their absence.

An employer is also going to be more likely to be in a position to manage absence effectively if they have **clear rules and procedures** for dealing with absences. These should be communicated to employees, and should be applied consistently. All employees should be made aware of any company rules that treat certain types or levels of absence as **disciplinary offences**.

Employers who already have the required rules and procedures in operation will already have taken the first steps in discouraging non-genuine short term absence. But what else can employers do to actively discourage absences during the World Cup?

You may wish to consider reminding employees that the World Cup is imminent, and encourage employees to book holidays on the dates that they wish to view World Cup games in advance. Obviously it is in the best interests of the Company that employees take holidays, rather than pull 'sickies'.

Further, employers could consider advising employees that the Company has designated one particular manager as the 'point of contact' for all employees reporting sick during the World Cup. You can then ensure that this designated manager is primed to ask a number of questions about symptoms etc. Hopefully if employees know that they will be asked a few probing questions, this may discourage them from calling in sick in the first place.

Employers should also consider diplomatically advising their workforce that any absences that coincide with World Cup games will be scrutinised more closely. Advising employees that on their return to work they will be subject to a return to work interview (whether this has been your previous practice or not) on their return may again help to dissuade employees from pulling a 'sickie'.

It would be hoped, that if the above measures are taken, they should, at the very least, discourage some potential absentees during the World Cup. However, it is to be expected that some employees will still call in sick, no matter what steps are taken to try and prevent absences.

If a pattern of absence is found for an employee during the World Cup, disciplinary action should be considered. Employers should note, however, that even if an employee is found to have been absent from work on match days, there is still the need to avoid liability for discrimination and unfair dismissal.

An employee may be absent from work on crucial match days, but if for example that employee has a disability, care must be taken to ensure that it is not their disability that has caused them to be absent, rather than World Cup fever.

- You should consider advising your workforce that absences that coincide with World Cup games will be scrutinised more closely. You should also consider advising employees that on their return to work they will be subject to a return to work interview.