

Top tips for Managing Absence in Sports Season

pg. 1

Along with Summer comes an increase in sports – which if left unchecked can lead to an increase in sporting sickies.



We know through experience that sickies soar during key sporting events – every summer we see Cricket, Wimbledon and Soccer tournaments that create all manner of ‘mystery bugs’.

HR Managers are already used to seeing unauthorised sickness absence rise if Andy Murray is playing well on Centre Court (and here’s hoping for another British win from our favourite champ!)

So what steps can HR Managers take to tackle the perfect storm of annual leave, leave clashes and absenteeism that can mar an otherwise sporty summer?

Here are our tips:

1. Keep an eye on sporting fixtures, even if you aren’t a fan yourself.

Make sure that you are prepared for possible sickies in advance, especially in staff-critical environments, such as nursing. It’s harder to get temporary cover during

Top tips for Managing Absence in Sports Season

pg. 2

major sporting events or the day after bank holiday, so plan in advance based on previous experience. Who was off last time? Reports are your ally!

2. Fair play is important in sport – it also extends to fair handling of leave.

Decide ahead how you will handle multiple requests for staff holiday, especially during sporting tournaments – if you can't authorise all of them, could you compromise and let people watch the fixtures at work instead? How will you decide who gets the time off? Make sure that your system is fair and visible, so that staff are aware of it in advance. Remember that staff who may not want to watch the game may need time off for other reasons – consider these requests on their merits.

3. Make staff aware of your policy on sickness absence and enforce it equally.

More than half of employed adults believe their work performance is negatively impacted when attendance policies are not fairly enforced throughout an organisation.

Poor motivation leads to absenteeism, so make sure your rules treat management and staff equally.

Staff are more likely to respect rules they see apply equally to everyone.

4. Educate your staff.

Staff who take sick days to 'watch the match' don't realise that short term absence has a big impact on the company's bottom line and is more disruptive to the business than long term sickness. Raising awareness can encourage them to book planned annual leave days rather than faking a 'sickie'.

5. Always use return to work forms and interviews.

Sporting absenteeism seems to have regular offenders – by having to complete a return to work self-certification form, or experiencing a return to work interview it's less likely to be brushed under the carpet. Inaction sets an example to the rest of your workforce, so if your reports spot a trend, act on it.

6. Consider using accurate reporting and recording systems

Spreadsheets and paper forms are less than ideal for managing both staff holiday and sickness absence, especially if more than one person is able to authorise leave. One council last year had highly paid technical staff covering photocopier clerks, all because a paper leave system administered by several different line managers allowed a whole department to take holiday at the same time. HR only found out at the last minute and were unable to obtain agency cover. In practice, by the time HR get involved, it's often too late. Absence management software is designed for purpose, prevents leave clashes at line manager level and usually saves more than it costs – it's also visibly fair!

7. Use sport to motivate staff

So far we've only looked at the down sides of the sporting season, but in my experience the best way to deal with sports tournaments is to recruit them as a cure! Here's just a few ways HR Managers can use the sporting season to build teamwork, engagement and motivation at work:

- Have sports themed team challenges at work, maybe even get two tickets to an event (with the time off work!) as a prize for the best performers.
- Have themed days in the office during matches/events and show them on TV to encourage attendance (who wants to be left out?)

Top tips for Managing Absence in Sports Season

pg. 4

- Consider using sporting enthusiasm to drive wellness, why not run an exercise challenge over summer?
- Keep an eye out for any team sports a company team could take part in
- Sport often promotes more interest in health so have healthy drinks and snacks available at work and see if your local gym will give your staff a free trial (Activ Absence customers can offer all their staff a free trial at any Nuffield Health gym free of charge)

Just because planned and unplanned absence is a serious issue, doesn't mean it has to be boring or arduous.

Sporty summers can be fun for HR people too, tackling absence with a little planning and setting out the rules of the game before play will go a long way!