

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 07 September 2021 14:37  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** FW: [P] URGENT, OFFICIAL AND SENSITIVE: HR matters relating to coronavirus within the NICS.

**Sensitivity:** Confidential

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**From:** Cooke, Michael (HR)  
**Sent:** 03 March 2020 14:17  
**To:** Pengelly, Richard [REDACTED] Minne, Jill [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; Brennan, Mike [REDACTED] Browne, Mark  
(Deputy Secretary) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Stewart, Chris (TEO) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; Baker, Derek [REDACTED] DfE Permanent Secretary Support  
[REDACTED] Godfrey, Katrina (DfI – Perm Sec) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Gray, Sue (DoF) [REDACTED]  
King, Brenda [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] May, Peter [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] McMahon, Denis [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Meharg, Tracy [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Widdis, Hugh [REDACTED] Sterling,  
David [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** McNabb, Chris [REDACTED] NICS HR Director [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; McLaughlin, Mark (DOF) [REDACTED] Rooney, Bernie  
[REDACTED] Hutton, Annette [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: [P] URGENT, OFFICIAL AND SENSITIVE: HR matters relating to coronavirus within the NICS.  
**Sensitivity:** Confidential

Richard,

Thank you for your e mail to Jill. I thought it would be useful to provide some answers on the matters you have raised.

- a. There will be a pivotal role for managers in special leave applications; to assist with this ER teams will be available to advice and support. There will of course need to be a balance of flexibility, common sense and what is fair and reasonable in any given circumstance.
- b. I am working on the wording, in the manager guidance, to clarify absence relating to the symptoms and positive testing of coronavirus will be discounted for absence purposes.

The guidance will be a fluid document which will be constantly updated to reflect circumstances as any given point in time regarding progression of coronavirus, so in the event of testing stopping we can update the guidance accordingly.

- c. I will write via Jill to NICS Board members in regard to the certification issue seeking a decision as to how we move forward.

I am planning to have the guidance to Board members, via Jill, later today for their consideration. I am aware of the decision to issue a service wide communication from DoH / NICS HR with messaging on coronavirus and how absence will be handled so am keen to get the guidance to you all.

Best regards,

Michael

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**From:** [REDACTED] **On Behalf Of** Pengelly, Richard  
**Sent:** 03 March 2020 13:50  
**To:** Minne, Jill [REDACTED] Brennan, Mike [REDACTED]; Browne, Mark (Deputy Secretary) [REDACTED] Stewart, Chris (TEO) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Baker, Derek [REDACTED]; DfE Permanent Secretary Support [REDACTED] Godfrey, Katrina (DfI – Perm Sec) [REDACTED] Gray, Sue (DoF) [REDACTED] King, Brenda [REDACTED] May, Peter [REDACTED] McMahon, Denis [REDACTED] Meharg, Tracy [REDACTED]; Pengelly, Richard [REDACTED] Widdis, Hugh [REDACTED] Sterling, David [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** Cooke, Michael (HR) [REDACTED] McNabb, Chris [REDACTED] [REDACTED]; NICS HR Director [REDACTED] McLaughlin, Mark (DOF) [REDACTED] Rooney, Bernie [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: [P] URGENT, OFFICIAL AND SENSITIVE: HR matters relating to coronavirus within the NICS.  
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Jill

I am broadly content with the proposals set out in the attached paper. It is acknowledged that some flexibility will be required as to what confirmation can be expected for special leave applications – it is likely that there will be ‘evidential challenges’ as line managers will be reliant on the accuracy of the information provided by staff.

However, I am concerned that section 4a states that where an absence is created based on coronavirus symptoms however the test is negative then the absence will revert to normal sickness absence arrangements and won’t be discounted for absence triggers and absence pay calculations. If coronavirus is circulating in the community testing will eventually stop – it simply wouldn’t be manageable for GPs to test every person presenting with symptoms. Therefore, GPs in writing absence lines will be unable to confirm coronavirus, this could result in absences certificates being less specific and recording e.g. flu like symptoms. The way the guidance is written all such absences would be treated as normal sickness absence. Therefore the guidance needs to be revisited to reflect that testing will stop.

Also consideration of the need for medical certificates may need to be considered. There is an important issue here about minimising demand on GP services. Some possible options, for a specified period, are (apart from no change):

1. Self - certification accepted (no requirement to provide a medical certificate)? For up to 21 days for confirmed or presumed covid-19 infection.
2. Self- certification accepted (no requirement to provide a medical certificate)? For up to 21 days for any flu like illness.
3. Self- certification accepted (no requirement to provide a medical certificate)? For up to 21 days for any illness.

Richard

**On behalf of Richard Pengelly**  
**Permanent Secretary**  
**Department of Health**  
**C5.22**  
**Castle Buildings**  
**Stormont Estate**  
**Belfast**  
**BT4 3SQ**  
**Tel:** [REDACTED]

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**From:** Minne, Jill  
**Sent:** 02 March 2020 17:07  
**To:** [REDACTED] Brennan, Mike [REDACTED]  
Browne, Mark (Deputy Secretary) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; Stewart, Chris (TEO)  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Baker, Derek [REDACTED]; DfE Permanent Secretary Support  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Godfrey, Katrina (DfI – Perm Sec)  
[REDACTED]; Gray, Sue (DoF)  
King, Brenda [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; May, Pete  
[REDACTED] McMahan, Denis  
[REDACTED] Meharg, Tracy  
[REDACTED] Pengelly, Richard  
[REDACTED] Widdis, Hugh [REDACTED] Sterling, David  
**Cc:** Cooke, Michael (HR) [REDACTED] McNabb, Chris [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] NICS HR Director [REDACTED] McLaughlin, Mark (DOF)  
[REDACTED] Rooney, Bernie [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** [P] URGENT, OFFICIAL AND SENSITIVE: HR matters relating to coronavirus within the NICS.  
**Importance:** High  
**Sensitivity:** Confidential

Dear NICS Board colleagues

As discussed at our meeting on Friday please find attached a paper setting out decisions required from the NICS Board on how absence relating to coronavirus will be managed within the NICS.

Following agreement on these matters NICSHR and communications colleagues will issue detailed guidance to managers and staff (agency staff will be covered in the guidance) and advise TUS.

Given the urgency of this issue I should be very grateful for a response on these particular matters by 2.00 pm tomorrow if possible.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Jill Minne**

**Strategic HR Director, NI Civil Service**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Floor | 2-4 Bruce Street | Belfast | BT2 7JD**

**Contact:** [REDACTED]

