

Return to work following absence on extended sick leave

Policy and Procedures

**Human Resources Management
Staff Health and Wellbeing Services**

Table of Contents

Purpose..... 3

Scope of Application 3

Roles and Responsibilities 4

Return to work Plan..... 6

- *Date of return to work*..... 7
- *Reasonable accommodation* 7

Return to work Discussion..... 8

Review of reasonable accommodation..... 8

Evaluation of return to work..... 8

Gradual/phased return to work..... 8

Annex A Return to work Form

Purpose

- 10 WHO is committed to providing a safe and healthy work environment for all staff members. In this context, WHO recognizes the need to facilitate a staff member's progressive return to work following an extended absence due to illness or injury.
- 20 A successful return to work aims to: (i) contribute to improving the staff member's health and paving the way to achieving a full recovery; (ii) maintain the staff member's ability to exercise the material functions of his or her post while still recuperating from his or her illness or injury; and (iii) reduce the costs for the Organization of extended sick leave without compromising the staff member's medical condition.
- 30 Beyond the administrative provisions applying to staff returning to work after an extended period of sick leave, the policy also aims to: provide an enabling and trusting environment for a successful return to work, in which a returning staff member knows that he or she is valued, reducing the emotional impact of extended sick leave that may include feelings of isolation and guilt.

Scope of Application

- 40 This policy applies to staff members returning to work after an uninterrupted period of sick leave of a minimum of 3 months. Upon advice of Director, Staff Health and Wellbeing services or delegate/Regional Staff Physician or delegate (referred to in this policy as SHW/RSP), on a case-by-case basis, the policy may also apply to staff members on shorter periods of sick leave who may require reasonable accommodation on return to work.
- 50 For the purpose of this policy, "sick leave" includes both sick leave as defined in Staff Rule 740, and/or sick leave under insurance cover (SLIC) as defined in Staff Rule 750.1. Cases will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by SHW/RSP.
- 60 This policy is developed pursuant to WHO eManual provisions in section III.6.9 Certified sick leave.
- 70 This policy sets out procedures which: are normally temporary in nature; may be adjusted over time; and, must be agreed on by the staff member, first-level supervisors and SHW/RSP. Human Resources Departments (HRO), Management Officers & HR Assistants (MO) in Headquarters, and Regional HR Managers (RHRM) are requested to support the process. All parties are required to fully participate in good faith in this collaborative process.
- 80 The return to work may be implemented only as soon as the staff member's medical condition allows with the goal of reducing the risk of relapse and potential for further sick leave.

- 90 This policy does not apply to persons with disabilities entering or already working in the Organization, including those who may acquire a disability in the course of his or her employment. In that case the policy in WHO eManual III.4.9 applies.
- 100 This policy does not establish new entitlements or benefits in addition to those provided for in the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules.
- 110 This policy and procedures outlined therein will be implemented without prejudice to any confidential medical information regarding the staff member which will remain accessible to SHW/RSP only.

Roles and Responsibilities

A staff member is responsible for:

- 120 Informing his or her first-level supervisor and SHW/RSP:
- a. of his or her dates of absence on sick leave and of any change in his or her status during sick leave, e.g. extension, percentage of absenteeism;
 - b. of an estimated date for return to work in advance of at least five working days from that date;
- 130 Informing SHW/RSP of any request for reasonable accommodation of the working environment to facilitate his or her return to work, supported by documentation from the treating physician(s) and/or other health professional(s);
- 140 Providing the appropriate medical certificate(s) in support of the sick leave absence to SHW/RSP within 14 calendar days in accordance with Staff Rules and eManual provisions;
- 150 Replying to any request from SHW/RSP with regards to further medical information and for providing details regarding the treating physician(s) and/or other health professional(s);
- 160 Contacting and coordinating with SHW/RSP to obtain medical clearance to report for duty preferably prior to and in all cases no later than the first day back, in accordance with eManual III.6.9;
- 170 Participating in the *Return to work Discussion* (see paragraph 510) with the first-level supervisor and signing off on the *Return to work Form* as required;
- 180 During the first month of his or her return to work (and thereafter as appropriate), participating in regular discussions with his or her supervisor and SHW/RSP and providing feedback on the effectiveness of the measures to determine whether such measures need to be maintained, further adapted or discontinued.

SHW/RSP is responsible for:

- 190 Approving requests for sick leave and monitoring the health status of the staff member during the full period of his or her sick leave;
- 200 Maintaining the confidentiality of the staff member's medical records and his or her reason for sick leave;
- 210 Contacting the staff member during his or her sick leave to ensure that he or she receives the appropriate care, and identify any medical, psychological or social issue that may occur taking the necessary steps to address these issues;
- 220 Coordinating the return to work in the best possible conditions in collaboration with the staff member, his or her supervisor(s), HRO, MO in Headquarters and RHRM in the regions;
- 230 With the staff member's consent, communicating with the treating physician(s) and / or other relevant parties to determine an approximate date of return to the work place as early as his or her medical condition will allow, and subject to the conditions below:
- 240 Recommending measures to be implemented to facilitate the staff member's return to work;
- 250 Informing the first level supervisor on:
 - a. how the employee's medical condition will or may affect his or her return to work without prejudice to any confidential medical information; and
 - b. whether the condition is considered to be temporary and if so the anticipated duration of any reasonable accommodation to be put in place;
- 260 Following up with the staff member in collaboration with the supervisor to monitor and evaluate the situation to ensure the effectiveness of the measures and determine any further adaptation or if the measures can be discontinued;
- 270 If no such accommodation is required for the staff member's return to duty, SHW/RSP must nevertheless, in accordance with WHO eManual III.6.9 paragraph 120, arrange to see the staff member for medical clearance normally not later than the first day back.

First-level supervisor is responsible for:

- 280 After being contacted by SHW/RSP, taking necessary steps to facilitate a successful return to work of the staff member, in collaboration with the staff member, SHW, HRO and MO in Headquarters, or RSP and RHRM in the regions, accommodating, where required and to the extent possible, the working conditions of the staff member as recommended by SHW/RSP;
- 290 Guiding his or her team towards a successful reintegration of the staff member, and a progressive redistribution of tasks and responsibilities as required, promoting team work and efficiency;
- 300 Discussing with SHW, HRO, MO in Headquarters or RSP, RHRM in the regions and concerned staff member with a view to reaching an agreement on a return to work plan, including:
 - a. Providing details about the staff member's duties and workplace, including work schedule;

- b. implementing reasonable accommodation as appropriate, based on SHW/RSP recommendations and prior to the staff member's return to work;
- 310 Meeting with the staff member on his or her first week back to work for a *Return to work Discussion* (see paragraph 510);
- 320 Documenting the *Return to work Plan* (see paragraph 390) within the *Return to work Form* (see Annex A and paragraph 530);
- 330 Organizing regular face-to-face discussions with the staff member during the first month of his or her return (and thereafter as appropriate) to monitor and evaluate the situation with a view to assessing whether the staff member is able to exercise the material functions of his or her post and to determine any further adaptation or if the measures can be discontinued; provide feedback to SHW/RSP as appropriate;
- 340 Taking appropriate action regarding performance evaluation (PMDS) if required, including revision of objectives as may be appropriate.

Second-level supervisor is responsible for:

- 350 Addressing any issues reported by any of the involved parties regarding the staff member's return to work and making every possible effort to support the process.
- 360 The second-level supervisor may also participate in the Return to Work discussion if it is deemed necessary by any of the other parties concerned.

HRO, MO, RHRM are expected to:

- 370 Support the process and all involved parties to facilitate the successful return to work of the staff member;
- 380 Provide guidance regarding HR planning if applicable.

Return to work Plan

- 390 A *Return to work Plan* is put in place in order to enable the staff member to be reintegrated into the work environment after extended sick leave. The plan is a transitional measure that may include modified employment (e.g. part-time) and/or reasonable accommodation (see paragraph 420) to enable the staff member to be reintegrated into the work environment after absence due to illness or injury. It should comprise:
- a. provisional date of return to work;
 - b. any reasonable accommodation sought to help the staff member get back to work and an expected end-date of any such accommodation;
 - c. details of how the return to work will be monitored and reviewed, including a regular schedule of communications between the parties involved.
- 400 The *Return to work Plan* will be documented within the *Return to work Form* (Annex A).

- *Date of return to work*

410 A provisional date of return to work (full-time or part-time) may be provided by the staff member and/or SHW/RSP in collaboration with the treating physician.

- *Reasonable accommodation*

420 “Reasonable accommodation” means necessary and appropriate measures to enable a staff member to be able to perform to the best of his or her ability on return to work following sick leave. The Organization undertakes to make every effort to provide reasonable accommodation for the required period.

430 In accordance with WHO eManual III.4.9 Employment of Persons with a disability, reasonable accommodation should not impose a disproportionate burden on WHO, in financial terms or in terms of its implications, its effects on the overall work process and with regard to length of the appointment.

440 The nature and extent of the accommodation required should be determined by the particular needs of that individual based on a recommendation by SHW/RSP, while balancing and taking into account the financial implications and operational needs of the Organization.

450 An expected end date for reasonable accommodation may be provided by SHW/RSP based on information received from treating physician and taking into consideration how long the condition, treatment or requirement for accommodation may continue.

460 Reasonable accommodation will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will take the form of a recommendation or a combination of recommendations by SHW/RSP following consultation with the concerned parties.

470 Reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to, adjustment and modification of equipment and/or modification of the working time, work organization and work location, and the adaptation of the work environment to provide access to the place of work e.g.

- a. exceptional teleworking based on medical grounds;
- b. a return to work part-time, combined, if needed with part-time sick leave;
- c. change in the office environment to provide reasonable accommodation e.g. change of office, ergonomic adjustments of the workstations etc.;
- d. a phased return through modified working hours;
- e. redistribution of certain tasks/responsibilities or modification of the work schedule and tasks;
- f. light duties, which may involve limiting or exceptionally excusing a staff member from performing certain tasks;
- g. modification to duty travel;
- h. if viable, exceptionally, a reassignment within the Organization.

480 In circumstances where consensus on reasonable accommodation cannot be reached among all the parties involved, Director HRD/DAF may be requested to review the case in consultation with the concerned parties in an effort to facilitate consensus.

- 490 Reasonable accommodation should normally be put in place from the first day of return to work.
- 500 A staff member may remain on sick leave, (full or part-time) subject to approval by SHW/RSP, if:
- a. reasonable accommodation cannot be provided to facilitate the staff member's return;
 - b. more time is required to establish the reasonable accommodation and the staff member is not able to return without the reasonable accommodation in place.

Return to work Discussion

- 510 The *Return to work Discussion* is an opportunity for the first-level supervisor to discuss any concerns, requests or questions that the staff member may have about his or her return to work and to welcome back the staff member.
- 520 The *Return to work Discussion* should normally take place at the latest during the first week back of the staff member and may include:
- updates on news, or changes, while the staff member was on sick leave;
 - discussion on the *Return to work Plan* with respect to the accommodation and timelines proposed;
 - questions about any other concerns or requests that the staff member may have on the return to work.
- 530 Confirmation that a return to work discussion has taken place must be documented within the *Return to work Form*.

Review of reasonable accommodation

- 540 The need for reasonable accommodation is normally temporary in nature. SHW/RSP will initiate a review of the reasonable accommodation normally within the first month of return to service and regularly thereafter in order that a decision may be taken, in consultation with the concerned parties, to extend or to discontinue the measures.
- 550 The review(s) and decisions must be documented by SHW/RSP in the *Return to work Form*, including record of requests, efforts made, proposals and decisions with regards to reasonable accommodation.

Evaluation of return to work

- 560 A time frame for evaluating and monitoring the return to work should be developed by SHW/RSP in order to assess the effectiveness of the measures and determine any further adaptation or if the measures can be discontinued. The evaluation is developed on a case by case basis.

Gradual/phased return to work

- 570 Upon approval by SHW/RSP, sick leave may continue to be granted during a gradual return to work i.e. a staff member may resume his/her regular work hours at 50%, while requesting sick leave for the remaining 50%.

580 Based on medical information received, consideration on a case-to-case basis may be given by SHW/RSP to a transition period for returning to work between 50% and 100% capacity prior to returning at 100%.

Effective Date

590 This policy takes effect on 12 February 2018.

RETURN TO WORK FORM

to be used following sick leave

Instructions: *Strictly no confidential medical information is to be indicated on this form.
The form will be retained in the staff member's medical file by SHW/RSP.*

Date:	Staff member name:	Staff No: S0xxxx	Date of birth:
Position:	Duty Station:	Dept/Unit:	Office no:

Dates of absence:

First date of absence:	Last date of absence at 100%:	Length of absence:

1. Return to work plan

The staff member will return to work under the following conditions:

Date of return:	Temporary accommodation: (see below for details)	Permanent accommodation: (see below for details)
-----------------	---	---

No reasonable accommodation required:	End date of reasonable accommodation:	Review date:
---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	--------------

Reasonable accommodation details:

Teleworking	Office environment/ergonomics	Modification in duties	Decrease in duty travel
Part-time schedule	Phased return	Reassignment	Other

Additional remarks/details regarding return to work plan and reasonable accommodation (a word document providing details of the return to work can also be attached to the form as necessary):

ANNEX A

2. Return to work discussion:

I, _____, confirm that a return to work discussion has taken place in the presence of my first-level supervisor.

Comments regarding return to work discussion:

Staff member signature

Date

First-level supervisor signature

Date

SHW/RSP signature

Date

Follow up and evaluation of return to work:

Date of closure:	Staff member signature:	SHW/RSP signature:
------------------	-------------------------	--------------------