

11 Reasons why employees fake sick leave

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According to the Labour Act, Section 14 subsection 2 ‘During any one year of service of an employee an employer shall, at the request of the employee supported by a certificate (medical documentation) signed by a registered medical practitioner (usually the employees health care provider / health care professional), grant up to ninety days’ sick leave on full pay.’ If during any one year of service of an employee, the employee has used up the maximum period of sick leave on full pay due to their health condition, an employer shall, at the request of the employee supported by a certificate (medical documentation) signed by a registered medical practitioner (usually the employees health care provider / health care professional), grant a further period of time of up to 90 days’ sick leave on half-pay. This is in instances where, in the opinion of the registered medical practitioner (the employees health care provider) signing the certificate, it is probable that the employee will be able to resume duty and perform their essential functions after the additional period of [sick leave](#) based on their current health condition.

If during any one year of service, the period or aggregate periods of sick leave exceeding 90 days’ as signed off by the employees health care provider / health care professional, sick leave on full pay or 180 days’ sick leave on full and half-pay, the employer may terminate the employment of the employee concerned due to their health condition.

An employee who so wishes may be granted accrued vacation leave instead of sick leave from their health care provider on half pay or without pay. Section 14A (4) of the Act further states that an employee who becomes ill (compromised health condition not allowing them to work) or is injured during a period of time of [vacation leave](#) may cancel his vacation leave and apply for sick leave.

Though this may be the case, many employees are found abusing sick leave rather than having excused absence. Do you find that your employees are missing in action on a more frequent basis during the month-end or every [Monday](#)? With the current [COVID 19 pandemic](#), many are taking the opportunity to call in sick from work. According to a study we conducted in 2019, people fake sick leave largely due to poor management systems that create a hostile environment for employees. Secondly, they fake sick leave because employers are not creating enough programs to deal with [work-life balance](#). In 2018 employees faked sick leave on average 9 days.

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Furthermore on average employee took 16 days of genuine sick leave. Research has shown that employees faking sick leave has been seen to [affect productivity](#) and the ability of the other employees to do their jobs properly. [Hayley Lewis](#), an occupational psychologist, said it takes confidence to tell your boss you need a break, and if the relationship is bad, employees will tend to be less truthful. Apart

from lying that they are sick just to take time off from work, below are reasons why employees fake sick leave:

Personal issues:

According to our study, most of the participants faked sick leave to deal with personal issues (60.47%). The following reasons were outlined in a study conducted by [Career Builder.com](https://www.careerbuilder.com):

- Some participants indicated that they just needed to relax and recharge (30 percent);
- Go to a doctor's appointment (27 percent);
- Catch up on sleep (22 percent);
- Run personal errands (14 percent);
- Catch up on housework (11 percent);
- Spend time with family and friends (11 percent);
- Another 34 percent just did not feel like going to work that day.

"In some companies, people don't feel comfortable telling their managers they need personal time off, so they will think of an elaborate excuse to get out of work," said [Rosemary Haefner](#), [CareerBuilder's](#) former vice president of [human resources](#). Employees may lie about being sick because they feel guilty about taking time off when others are depending on them, and they may be worried about being judged for taking time off (Business News Daily, 2020).

Company Size:

Various studies conclude that company size affects [employee absence](#). One study, for example, found an average absence level of 6,15 days per employee in companies with fewer than 50 employees, compared to eight days per employee in companies with 100 and more employees. The statistics vary by country and by industry. For example in the United Kingdom, the [Office for National Statistics](#) revealed that employees lost an average of 4.4 working days per employee in 2018 because of sickness or injuries.

Level of satisfaction with the job environment:

Some studies have shown that employees who are unsatisfied with their jobs are high to fake being sick in order not to go into work. Their morale is usually low, hence they feel less [motivated](#) to go to work so they would rather stay at home or engage in personal business on a workday.

Corporate Culture:

Research has shown that some organizations have so much [work pressure](#) that employees find it difficult to take time off. Employees feel tremendous pressure to put in long hours without much breaks or any time off. This puts workers in a tight spot as they are forced to lie to take some time off to rest from all the work pressure. The allure of a fake sick day is so powerful that a lot of workers head into work when

they are under the weather. In a study conducted by [PayScale](#), more than a third of workers, 37 percent, said they have gone to work when they were sick to save up their sick days for when they were feeling well.

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Personal lifestyle factors:

Studies indicate that harmful habits, such as smoking and alcohol abuse, account for as much as 25 percent of sick leave. Likewise, dependent children at home also impact on absence. It has been established that the younger the children, the higher the absence rate.

For this reason, female employees are generally absent more often than males, but female absences have been shown to reduce as the age of dependent children increases.

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Alcoholics usually capitalize on this by seeing a doctor first before relaxing and enjoying a beer at a bar purporting to be sick. The person will drink a lot of beer only to report tomorrow to work sick because of a hangover.

Job-related Stress:

Research has shown that one in five people suffer from high levels of [work-related stress](#). Work-related stress has been seen to cause illness and behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking among employees. Work-related stress also causes low morale causing employees to fake being ill. Research also found 85% of employees feel their manager is more likely to think their need for time off is genuine if they say they are suffering from a cold or flu rather than for stress or anxiety (Human Resources Director, 2019).

Management Styles:

In a survey conducted by [Com Res for BBC](#), it was found that 58% of respondents felt their managers were not equipped to deal with the emotional or human side of management. Chris Kerridge, an employee engagement expert at software company [MHR](#), said that if managers were unapproachable, it was natural that employees might be tempted to fake a sick day. “To address the issue and build trust between both parties, organizations must train their managers to become better people managers so they have the skills to identify early warning signs of burnout and sickness, while frequent one-to-one meetings will ensure employees feel confident talking to them openly about any concerns they have,” he said.

Related: [Management Styles: Everything you need to know](#)

Economic Strain/ Work-Life Balance:

[David Ossip](#), president, and CEO of workforce management consultant [Dayforce](#) said increased sick-time use is the result of economic strain on the family. Where there may have been a stay-at-home parent before, now both parents are working. “People need a sense of work-life balance,” he said. “And this is an outcome of that.”

Related: [Work-life Balance Quiz](#)

Extend weekend/ Holiday Season:

CCH found in its 2007 survey that periods of calling in sick are greatest on Monday and Friday, around holidays such as Christmas and the Fourth of July, and also during flu and hay fever seasons. Some employees will fake being ill to extend their weekend or holiday (just for an extra day or two to enjoy the weekend or holiday).

Dislike working with their colleagues:

Not all employees enjoy working with their colleagues, some dread going to work because of the people they work with so they would rather fake being sick than having to face their colleagues daily. One study found that 1 percent took a day off because they disliked their colleagues or [management](#).

Crazy Reasons:

According to research, not all reasons are genuine for one calling in sick. Some rather crazy reasons have been given by employees for faking illness i.e.: “my soccer team lost their game last night so I am feeling depressed”, “I ate too much at a party yesterday, so I do not feel too well”, “my dog is sick, I cannot leave him like this”, “I can’t find my false teeth”, “I am related to a health care professional in the health care industry, therefore, I will just capitalise on that and use it as proof at work as a sick note from a health care provider” just to name a few.

Faking sick leave has been seen to affect an organization's productivity and has been seen to be quite costly for an organization. A major airline revealed that unscheduled absences were costing them nearly \$1 million per day (Kaleta, 2003). A human resources information provider showed that an average annual cost of absences to employers amounted to a record of \$789 per employee in 2002. According to the [International Business & Economic Research Journal May/ June 2016](#) there is how organizations can tackle issues of unwarranted absenteeism:

Related: [Absenteeism in the workplace: Impact, causes, and policies](#)

Creation of positive company culture:

Many employers believe absenteeism can be reduced by making the workplace a positive and

welcoming environment. Positive [company culture](#) helps to promote [job satisfaction](#), and job satisfaction is an important factor in reducing absenteeism. Having Clear expectations about employee and company expectations and ensuring that there is a true match is important in establishing job satisfaction (Truman, 2003). [Wellness programs](#) also have been shown to help employee morale. It is all about having a good place to work, which in turn, causes employees to want to be there. Their jobs are not depressing, draining a portion of their lives or causing [mental health issues](#). Mental health is the absence of mental illness or a state of psychological well-being.

Related: [How to Create a Positive Culture for Your Company](#)

Childcare and Flexible Scheduling

Company childcare support is an invaluable benefit for employees with young children. In just one year, a backup child-care program saved a company more than 2,500 lost days (Brown, 2003). The center was created especially for employees who have nowhere else to turn when their babysitter calls in sick. When this company was exploring the possibility of corporate affiliated daycare service, they forecasted that around 395 employees would register for the service and that an estimated 1,400 absences would be avoided. Instead, an amazing 800 employees had registered and an estimated 2,528 missed days were saved (Brown, 2003).

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Incentives:

Employee [incentive programs](#) to help reduce absenteeism have been used in the business world for quite some time. This type of program is affectionately termed the “carrot approach” rather than the “stick approach”. It is a popular employee benefits program that motivates employees. Incentives can be offered in several different ways. In this case, organizations can offer to pay employees at the end of the year for unused leave days as one of their employee benefits. For some organizations, this has been seen to help in reducing absenteeism.

According to a survey by [Career Builder](#) over a third of employers (38 percent) have checked up on a worker who called in sick to make sure he or she was sick, and 26 percent have fired a worker for calling in sick with a fake excuse (up from 22 percent last year). Forty-three percent have caught an employee lying about being sick by checking out their social media posts, up from 34 percent last year. When checking up on an employee who called in sick, 64 percent of employers required a doctor's note, 46 percent called the employee, 25 percent had another worker call the employee, and 22 percent drove by their house or apartment. Seeing that [absenteeism](#) can be costly for an organization, organizations need to put in place measures that can ensure that absenteeism especially due to fake sick leave is reduced.

There is a need for employees to understand what leave options (clear set out company [policies](#) e.g. excused absence to an eligible employee, sick leave policies - including expecting medical documentation required etc.) are in place and how they can apply and the requirements. An [eligible employee](#) can take leave for reasons such as spending time with a new child. It is also important for

employees to understand the consequences for faking issues like being ill i.e.: disciplinary action, or possible dismissal. It is the [Human Resource Professionals](#) role to ensure that employees are aware of the disciplinary action to be taken when they fake sick leave.

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