



Coronavirus shines light on utter inadequacy of statutory sick pay

09 Mar 2020

The only people who know what Statutory Sick Pay is are the low paid workers living the grim reality of being fined for falling ill. This week we exposed their daily reality, triggering emergency legislation and winning millions of pounds' worth of full sick pay for our members.

We sounded the alarm about the impossible choice facing our members. We informed the country that paying health workers Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will hinder efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19. As it turns out, aside from our members - who admit coming to work ill to avoid losing pay – no one had thought of that.

As cases of Coronavirus in the UK increase, the media spotlight has provided much needed scrutiny on Statutory Sick Pay. For decades GMB Union and the Labour movement have fought employer by employer to improve SSP, but as fears grow about containing the spread of Covid-19 the inadequacy of SSP has become a clear public health issue.

At £94.25 per week, not only is SSP cripplingly low in cash terms, but in order to get it you must forfeit three day's pay. These so called 'qualifying days' are a financial penalty designed to see how sick you really are. Employers who cling to the absolute minimum wage tend not to go above the statutory minimum for anything else either.

The reality of this means a lack of savings, and little or no flex in workers' monthly budgets. It makes staying at home unpaid an option our members simply can't afford, so instead, they drag themselves to work in order to pay the bills.

This week under the double pronged pressure of long-awaited public awaking to what SSP actually is and an escalating global health crisis the Prime Minister conceded. He temporarily scrapped the three unpaid qualifying days for those required to 'self-isolate'. Marking a definitive acceptance that the 'qualifying days' force people to work when sick.

The importance of this concession can't be overstated. The narrative has shifted from a moral argument to a public health one and by aligning the self-interest of the general public with a complex and insufficient statutory entitlement we've illuminated these employers who so often operate in the shadows.

This week, global service provider ISS, pledged full pay for nearly 50,000 UK staff should they need to self-isolate. Sodexo quickly followed and agreed full pay from day one for all health workers. Since then Hermes and G4S and Interserve have agreed the same. They've bowed to the pressure created by their own staff who were brave enough to unionise and take action.

“ Workers on the NHS front line are facing impossible choices over the #CoronaOutbreak

**@Lola_McEvoy was on @BBCr4today this morning demanding leadership from the NHS and the government #coronavirusuk #CoronaVirusUpdate
pic.twitter.com/OLg0qj01Se**

— GMB UNION (@GMB_union) March 2, 2020

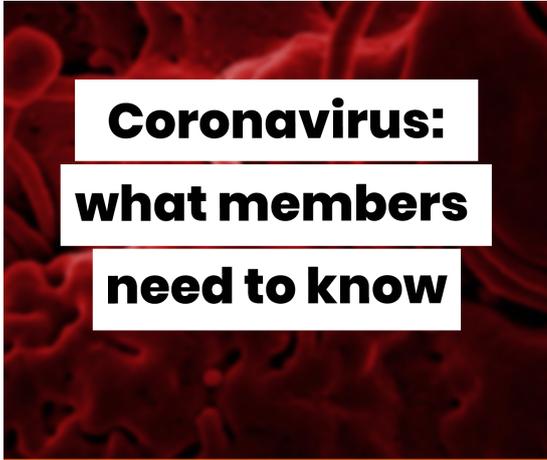
At its creation in 1983 SSP was costed at 84% of full earnings for low paid workers. Currently it equates to a third of a week's pay on the minimum wage, less than that of a week on the infamously inadequate Universal Credit. So even from day one SSP is not enough to keep people at home. The employers above know that too which is why they've buckled so quickly.

Covid-19 has brought the everyday reality for those living on low-pay into the public eye. The crisis has exposed the impossible choice facing our members: paying their rent, feeding their kids and keeping the electric topped up OR self-isolating on a than a third of their normal pay.

This week our members made the headlines, their stories cut through to those who's self-interest doesn't often align with a hospital porter or cleaner.

As with Covid-19 the next few weeks are uncertain but if there's one thing we can take from this week – increasing statutory sick pay is definitely in the public interest.





**Coronavirus:
what members
need to know**

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