

# New survey shows small firms made of strong stuff

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) today published research that details the impacts and issues surrounding ill-health within small firms.



The key finding from the survey is that the average number of days small businesses lost to absence per employee was 1.8 days. This is compared to the 8.4 days average in businesses of all sizes as reported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. In the public sector the average is 11.3 days.

Many small businesses paint a positive picture, with 43% of firms having no sickness absence in the past year.

Business owners take an average of 3 days sick leave per year and many are under pressure to continue to work through sickness to ensure the continuity of the business.

However, unexpected absences hit small businesses the hardest. Without any warning a small firm can find itself without a large proportion of its workforce, even though it can be just one member of staff. Covering for absence is also extremely difficult in the small business environment because of the costs and administration involved for the owner in finding cover. The owner also has to take the strain of the additional workload until cover can be found.

Mary Boughton, FSB National Health and Safety Chairman, said:

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“This report sheds welcome light on the issue of health at work for small firms. With small businesses employing around half of the private sector workforce, 12 million jobs rely on ensuring small firms keep going when staff are ill.

“The report demonstrates the team spirit that runs through small firms with staff and owners more likely to be at work to keep the business running. However, it also identifies ways in which small businesses can be better supported to safeguard their employees’ health.

“The report’s recommendations should be acted upon by the Government and healthcare professionals so that the well-being of small firms and their employees can be maintained and improved. The health of the UK economy depends on it.”



## The report recommends:

- Incentives for providing access to occupational health care and health promotion initiatives should be made available to enable small businesses to give the maximum help to their employees. An important part of this is reduced Employers’ Liability Compulsory Insurance in return for good workplace health and safety practices.
- Clearer and more consistent information from government and other sources must be made available about managing sickness absence, particularly with respect to employers’ and employees rights and responsibilities.
- The administration of Statutory Sick Pay should be explained more clearly and the process streamlined to relieve the headache it creates for small businesses.
- Timely access to NHS health care is really important for employers and employees alike to maximise the productivity of businesses. Advice given by GPs and other health professionals needs to take the workplace context into account.
- Businesses need affordable sickness absence insurance, specifically for sole traders and small businesses, improved income protection insurance schemes and clearer information about private medical insurance schemes.