

Absenteeism and Presenteeism – Two Things that Should Matter to Every Organisation

by [EAPA-SA](#) | Jan 4, 2021 | [Articles](#)

It is likely that you have heard the terms ‘absenteeism’ and ‘presenteeism’ spoken of as two of the barometers of employee-wellbeing, but do you understand the serious connotations of high levels of absenteeism or presenteeism and how much of an impact these workplace issues can have on an organisation? They go far beyond employees calling in sick too often or taking chunks of time out, while at work, to deal with personal matters.



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What are absenteeism and presenteeism?

Although they are related, absenteeism and presenteeism are different issues. Absenteeism is classified as an employee’s unplanned absence from work and is easily tracked and quantifiable, while presenteeism occurs when an employee comes to work but is not actually working. Just

because an employee is at the office does not mean they are being productive. This makes presenteeism much harder to quantify and unchecked, it can have an even bigger economic effect on an organisation than rampant absenteeism does. 1

The rise of e-presenteeism

With the advent of COVID-19, organisations across the world have experienced a massive rise in remote working. And, multiple studies have found that presenteeism has risen rapidly since the COVID-19 lockdown began. For example, According to recent research from the Mental Health Foundation, 80% of HR managers in the USA believe the recent rapid increase in home working is actually creating an presenteeism' tidal wave. Given its remote and digital nature, this phenomenon has been named 'e-presenteeism'. E-presenteeism has brought with it new and emerging management issues. 2

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Signs of e-presenteeism include:

- Lower levels of productivity
- More mistakes than usual
- Starting late or finishing early
- A lower standard of work than usual
- Looking tired or exhausted
- A lack of care about results and output

How can organisations manage presenteeism within a remote workforce?

- **Do not help to perpetuate an ‘always on’ workplace mindset**

Help your employees to stick to routines and switch off at the end of the working day when their home is their office. This can be accomplished through:

- Avoiding working in rooms in which they will spend the rest of the evening, where possible
- Maintaining a healthy working routine throughout the day to ensure a feeling of regularity that helps with switching off in the evening
- Getting out at lunchtime and taking breaks
- Consciously closing laptops, switching off a work phone and logging out of or muting any work-related apps or accounts on personal devices
- Signing off and bidding colleagues a ‘good evening’ to signal one is leaving the office
- Planning a leisure activity at the end of the day

Source: <https://www.hive360.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Switching-Off.pdf>

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- **Create a supportive environment**

It is essential to ensure your employees feel supported and comfortable enough to communicate openly and honestly about their wellbeing. This will help to combat presenteeism as it helps to identify early signs of stress. If left untreated, these can develop into serious health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

- - Communicate regularly with colleagues, checking on both their mental wellbeing and job satisfaction
 - Reward and recognise output rather than hours worked. Acknowledging and rewarding the extended hours an employee puts in can encourage the continuation of them working hours outside of their contract. Instead, focus on rewarding results and tasks completed. Although employees may not be able to travel, it is important to encourage them to take their annual leave. Having time out to feel refreshed and relaxed not only boosts wellbeing, but productivity and engagement will increase when annual leave is over
 - Provide employees with tips and resources to manage their physical, mental and financial wellbeing
 - Be flexible as some of your employees may have children to teach or other family members to care for.
- **Outline a formal work from home absenteeism policy**

Now, with remote working, more employees may feel pressured to ‘turn up’ for work due to being at home. It is important to remind them that the organisation’s illness policy still stands.

- All policies should be easily accessible to staff via an App or a Portal so that they can remind themselves of what is expected
- Within your policy, it’s a good idea to highlight that staff won’t be penalised for being unwell and that their judgement of deeming themselves unable to work will be respected as long as they follow the proper communications necessary to inform their line managers of their absence
- An alternative to taking a complete sick day could be a flexible working day. If an employee is feeling unwell at a certain point of the day, allow them to switch off until they feel better and work a part-day shift that suits them. 3

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We still do not know exactly what the new normal will look like and as organisations look ahead, it is essential, for the benefit of organisations and employees alike, that employers are cognisant, employee-focused and take advantage of any means at their at their disposal to maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of their staff; to help ensure each of their employees remains as healthy, engaged and productive as possible.