

Bupa Reveals Workplace Absence Costs Britain's Small Businesses 10% Of Turnover



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A significant proportion of the UK's small business bosses are risking burnout and ill health as they battle absence to keep businesses afloat, according to Bupa research.

Four in ten (40 per cent) heads of small companies told researchers they continue to work from their sick beds when ill, rather than take time off to recover because there's nobody else to pick up their work.

They are also battling mental as well as physical strain. With financial pressure and a lack of resources hampering succession planning, a third of SME bosses (31 per cent) said that their business would collapse if they were to take time off.

However, while small business owners put their own physical and mental health and wellbeing at risk, it seems their employees may be compounding the problem. Nearly two thirds (62 per cent) of small business bosses say that employee absence is negatively affecting their business, and according to 46 per cent, high levels of employee absence are estimated to contribute up to a 10 per cent drop in turnover in small businesses.

Tony Wood, sales and marketing director at Bupa said: "Small business bosses are real troupers; they are totally committed to running their firms in sickness as well as health. However they need to think about how to take care of their health needs and those of their staff, as working through sickness isn't a long-term solution for anyone."

Four in ten (38 per cent) bosses admit they spend more on office stationery than initiatives that support employee health and wellbeing, such as [flu jabs](#), cycle to work schemes and subsidised gym membership.

Dr Jenny Leaser, Clinical Director of Occupational Health, Bupa, suggests that small business heads should see investment in employee health and wellbeing as a beneficial long-term investment: "There are lots of things bosses can do to support staff and reduce the pressure of sickness absence. Staff benefits such as flu jabs or health checks can make a huge difference and are relatively low cost. Absence can be less of a burden if it is properly managed, for example through part-time return to work plans which can see staff return sooner. To get advice tailored to individual business needs, bosses should consult an occupational health specialist."

The Bupa research showed that the sectors worst affected by workplace absence are property and technology companies, with 77 per cent of small business bosses surveyed in each of these sectors agreeing that sick leave has a financial impact on business. Other sectors which said that unplanned leave caused their business to suffer significantly were hospitality (58 per cent) and retail (50 per cent).

These figures come in the wake of Bupa's 2011 study that found over half (51 per cent) of all HR managers claim that staff sickness absence puts additional [work related stress](#) on those employees left to 'hold the fort'. One in three (31 per cent) staff stated they had to take on extra overtime to pick up additional workload as a result of colleagues being off sick. The research was in response to the Government's Sickness Absence Review in November which found that the way sickness absence is managed by businesses can radically alter the length of time someone is off work.

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Notes to editors:

Research conducted by ICM Research. Total sample size was 250 business owners and members of senior management from UK-based Small Medium Enterprises. Fieldwork was undertaken between 14th – 23rd February 2012.

About Bupa

Bupa's purpose is to help people live longer, healthier, happier lives.

A leading international healthcare group, Bupa offers personal and [business health insurance](#), runs care homes for older people and hospitals and provides workplace health services, [employee health assessments](#) and chronic disease management services, including health coaching, and home healthcare.

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