Article

Sickness absence in the UK labour market: 2025

Sickness absence rates of workers in the UK labour market, including number of days lost and reasons for absence. These are official statistics in development.

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1 . Main points

- Sickness absence estimates for 2025 include the full effect of the improvements in Labour Force Survey (LFS) data collection and sampling methods introduced from January 2024.
- An increased amount of volatility will remain in these LFS estimates for 2023 and 2024, so we advise additional caution when interpreting changes involving these periods.
- The sickness absence rate in 2025 was 2.0%, which is unchanged from 2024; the sickness absence rate is defined as the percentage of working hours lost because of sickness or injury.
- An estimated 148.8 million working days were lost because of sickness or injury in 2025; this is, on average, 4.4 days lost per worker.
- Groups with the highest rates of sickness absence in 2025 included women, older workers, those with long-term health conditions, people working part-time, people working in the public sector, and people working in process, plant and machine operatives occupations.

These are official statistics in development and we advise caution when using the data. Read more in Section 7: Data sources and quality.

2 . How sickness absence has changed over time

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected sickness absences in many ways. While the virus may have led to additional absences, measures such as furloughing, social distancing, shielding, and increased homeworking helped to reduce other causes of absence in 2020.

However, sickness absences increased to above pre-pandemic levels in 2021, which was likely caused by:

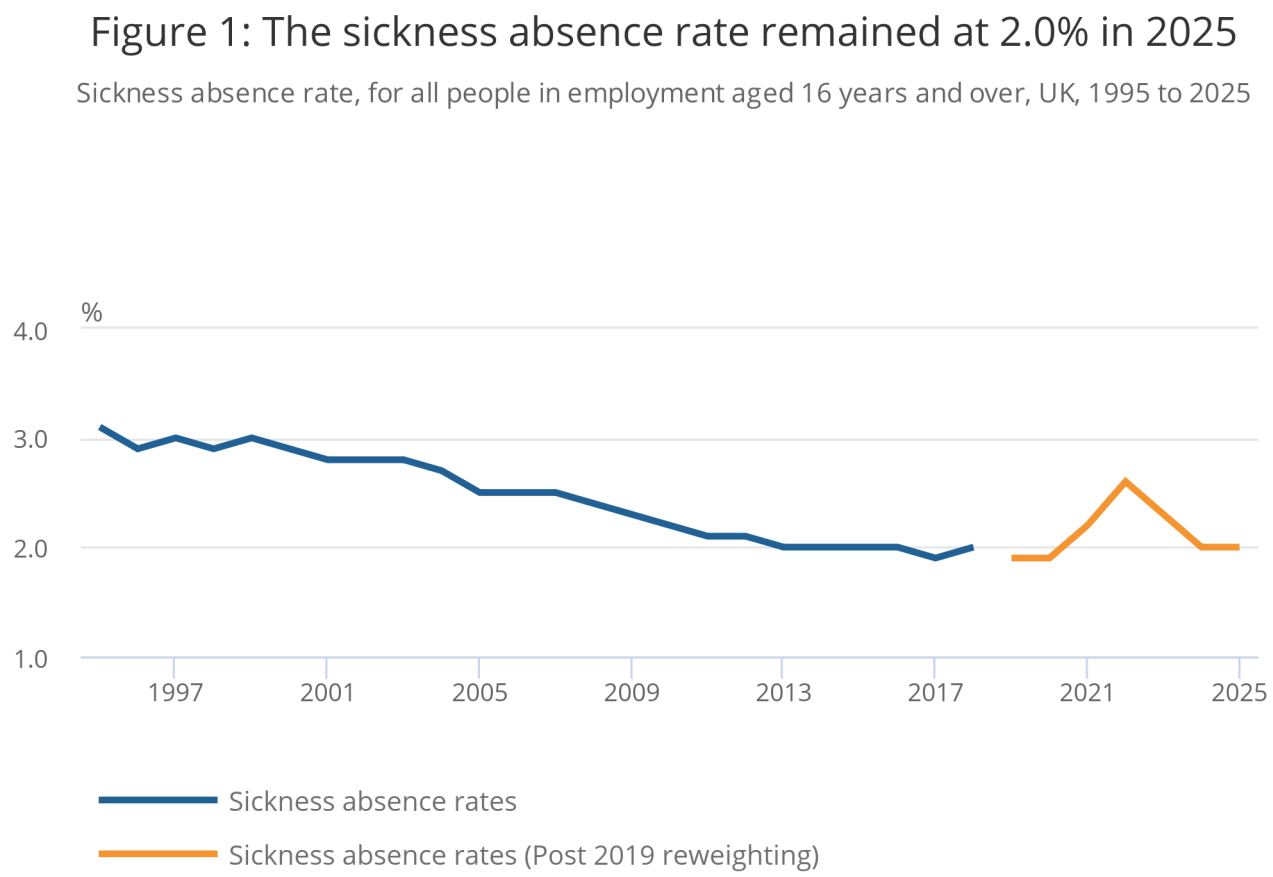
- the reduction to the furlough scheme and its eventual end in September 2021
- the decline in homeworking, shielding, and social distancing policies
- the spread of new COVID-19 variants

Sickness absence increased again in 2022 before starting to fall in 2023.

The sickness absence rate (the percentage of working hours lost because of sickness or injury) was 2.0% in 2025, which was the same rate as the 2024 value. This is 0.1 percentage points above the pre-pandemic 2019 level.

Figure 1: The sickness absence rate remained at 2.0% in 2025

Sickness absence rate, for all people in employment aged 16 years and over, UK, 1995 to 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

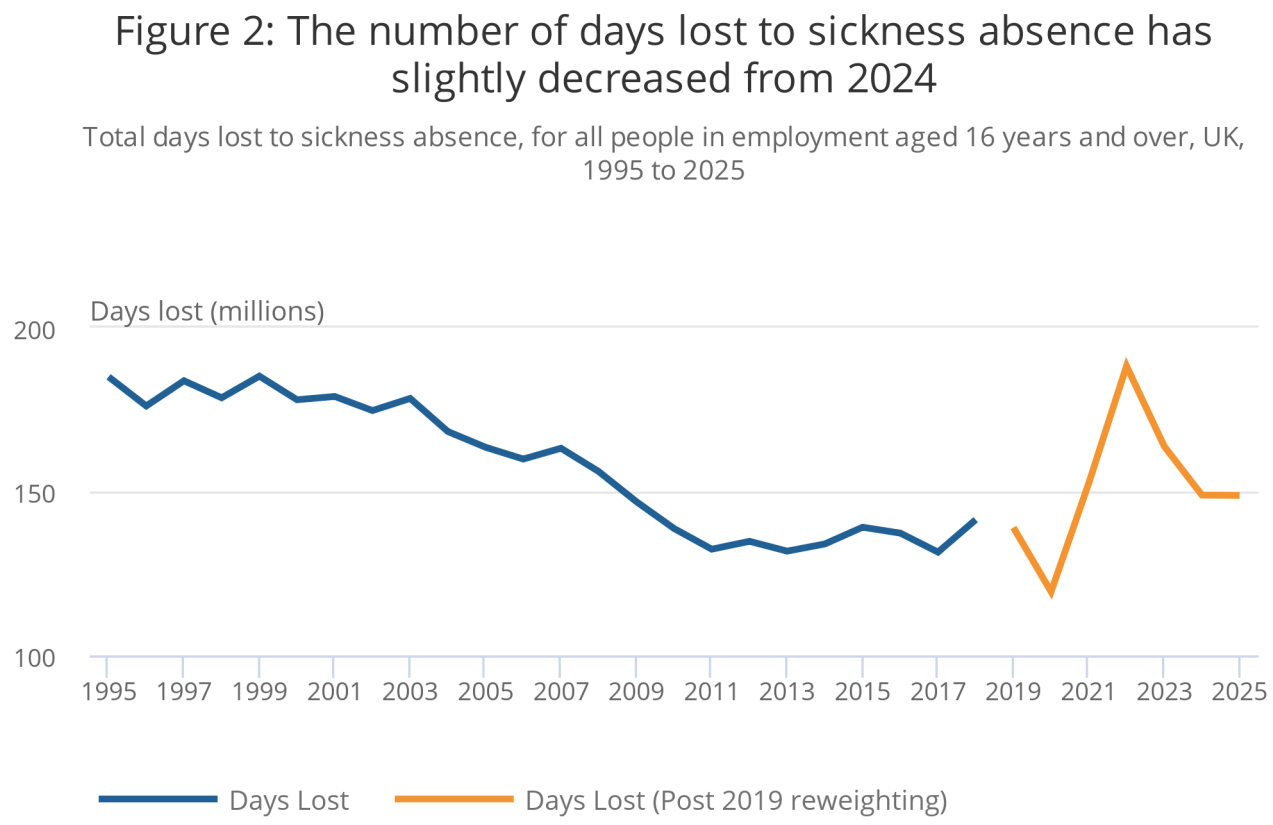
1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.
2. Data from 2019 onwards have been reweighted, causing a step change discontinuity.

There were an estimated 148.8 million working days lost because of sickness or injury in 2025 (Figure 2). This is a decrease of 0.1 million working days from 2024, but an increase of 9.8 million working days from the pre-pandemic 2019 level. There were, on average, 4.4 days lost per worker in 2025 , which was the same as the 2024 value, but 0.2 days above its 2019 level.

Caution should be taken when analysing total days lost, and days lost per worker for 2020 and 2021. This is because of the impact of furloughed workers and policy during the coronavirus pandemic.

Figure 2: The number of days lost to sickness absence has slightly decreased from 2024

Total days lost to sickness absence, for all people in employment aged 16 years and over, UK, 1995 to 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

2. Data from 2019 onwards have been reweighted, causing a step change discontinuity.

3 . Reasons given for sickness absence

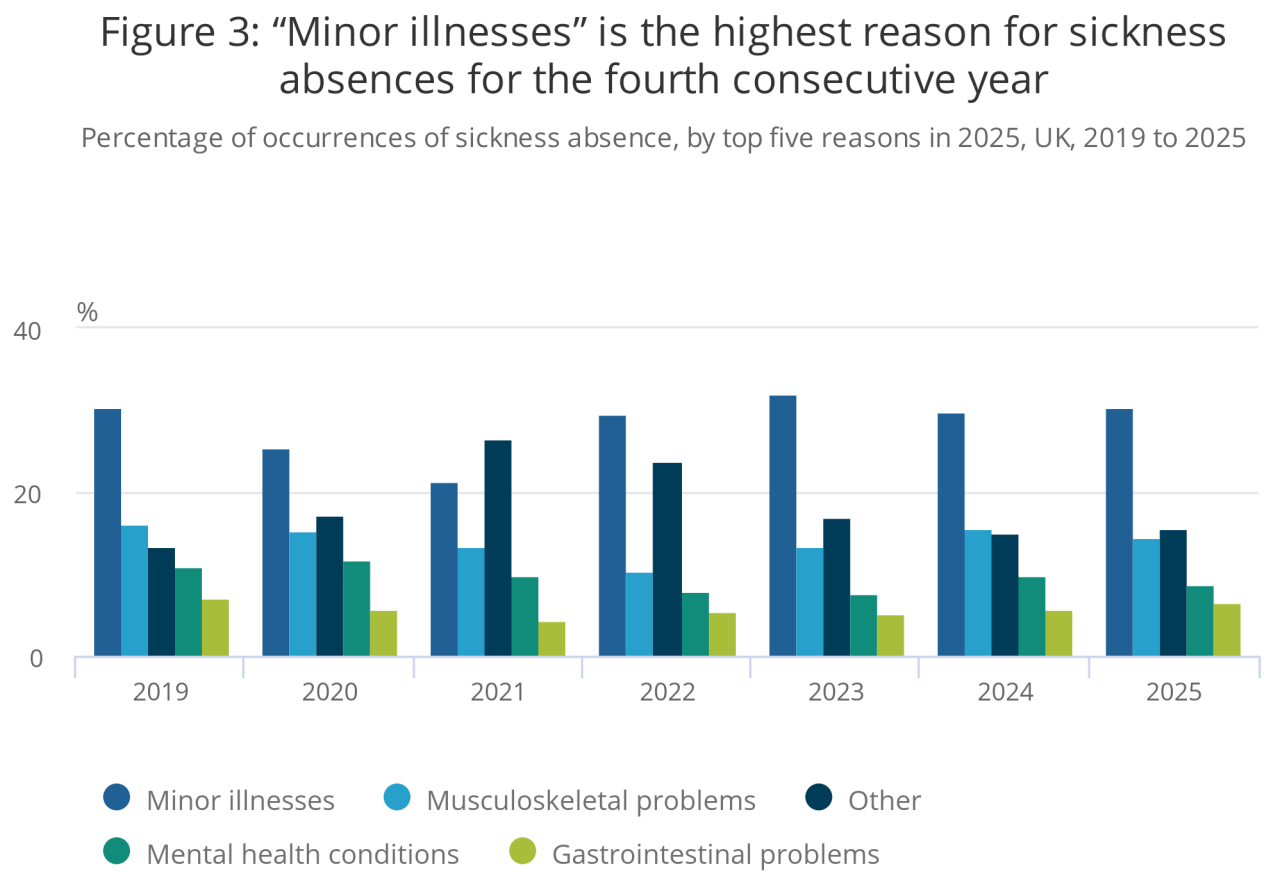
Minor illnesses continue to be the most common reason given for sickness absence in 2025, accounting for 30.4% of occurrences of sickness absence, followed by:

- "other" conditions at 15.6%
- musculoskeletal problems at 14.6%
- mental health conditions at 8.9%
- gastrointestinal problems at 6.6%

Gastrointestinal problems has overtaken respiratory conditions as the fifth most common reason given for sickness absence for the first time since 2020.

Figure 3: “Minor illnesses” is the highest reason for sickness absences for the fourth consecutive year

Percentage of occurrences of sickness absence, by top five reasons in 2025, UK, 2019 to 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The percentage of occurrences is the percentage of times a specific reason was given for hours lost because of sickness.
2. Definitions of reasons can be found in Section 6: Glossary.
3. "Other" includes coronavirus (COVID-19), accidents, poisonings, infectious diseases, skin disorders and diabetes.
4. Reasons not included in the top five can be found in the datasets.
5. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

4 . Groups with the highest sickness absence rate

The sickness absence rate was 1.7% for men and 2.4% for women in 2025. Compared with 2024, there was a rise of 0.1 percentage points for men, but a fall of 0.1 percentage points for women. Since 2019, the sickness absence rate for men has risen 0.1 percentage points, while the women's sickness absence rate has remained the same.

The sickness absence rates are higher among older workers than younger workers. The sickness absence rate was 1.3% for those aged 16 to 24 years, increasing to 3.3% for those aged 65 years and over.

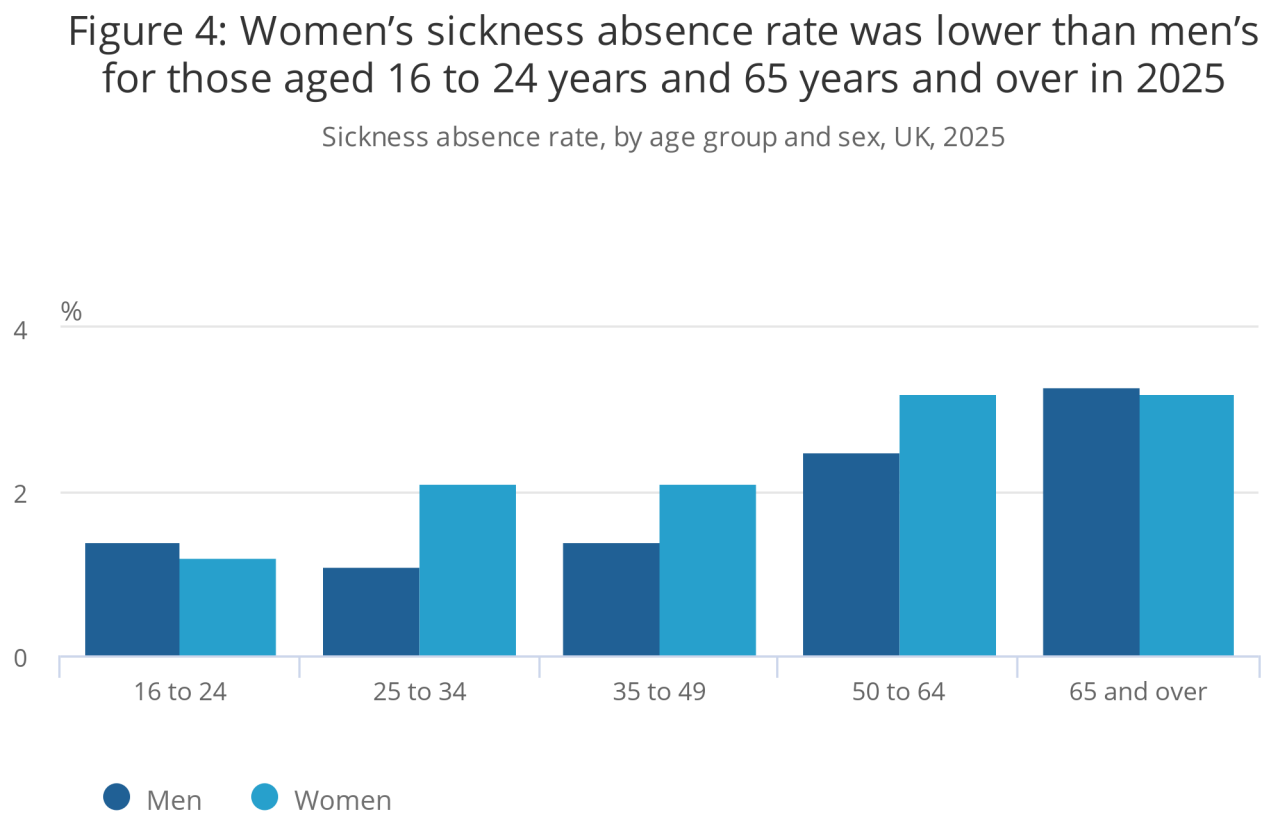
Compared with 2024, the sickness absence rate for those aged 25 to 34 years decreased by 0.1 percentage points but increased by 0.2 percentage points for those aged 65 years and over. There was no change from 2024 in the other age groups. Compared with 2019, workers aged 65 years and over have seen a 0.5 percentage point increase in sickness absence rate, which was more than any other age group. Workers aged 65 years and over remain the only age group not to have a sickness absence rate close to levels seen before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The sickness absence rate was generally higher for women than for men. Among men, the rates were higher for those aged 16 to 24 years and those aged 65 years and over. The age group with the lowest sickness absence rate was men aged 25 to 34 years, at 1.1%. The lowest rate for women was among those aged 16 to 24 years, at 1.2%.

Men aged over 65 years had the largest increase in sickness absence rate compared with 2024, with a 0.6 percentage point increase. Women aged over 65 years had the largest decrease in sickness absence rate compared with 2024, with a 0.6 percentage point decrease.

Figure 4: Women's sickness absence rate was lower than men's for those aged 16 to 24 years and 65 years and over in 2025

Sickness absence rate, by age group and sex, UK, 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

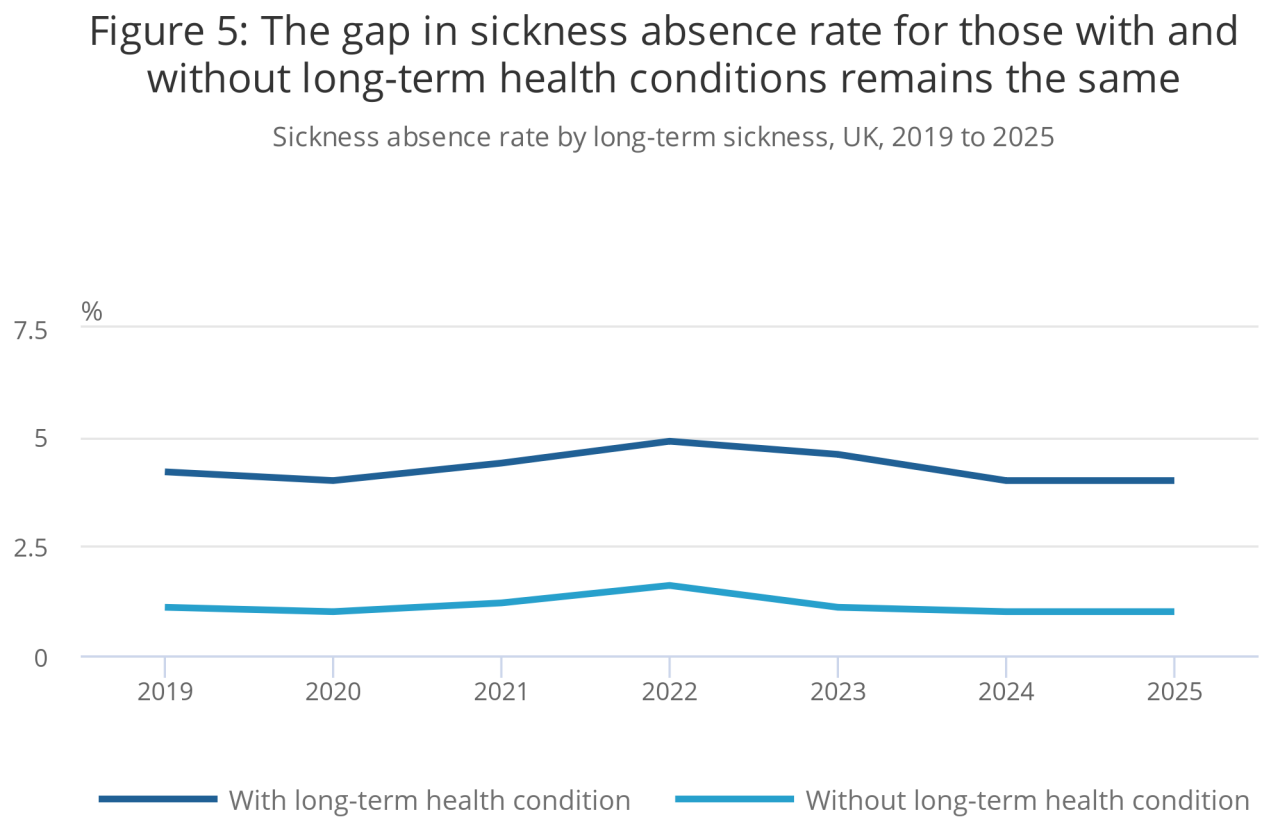
Notes:

1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

The sickness absence rate for those with long-term health conditions was 4.0%. For those without long-term health conditions, the rate was 1.0%. There was no change on the year for either group.

Figure 5: The gap in sickness absence rate for those with and without long-term health conditions remains the same

Sickness absence rate by long-term sickness, UK, 2019 to 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

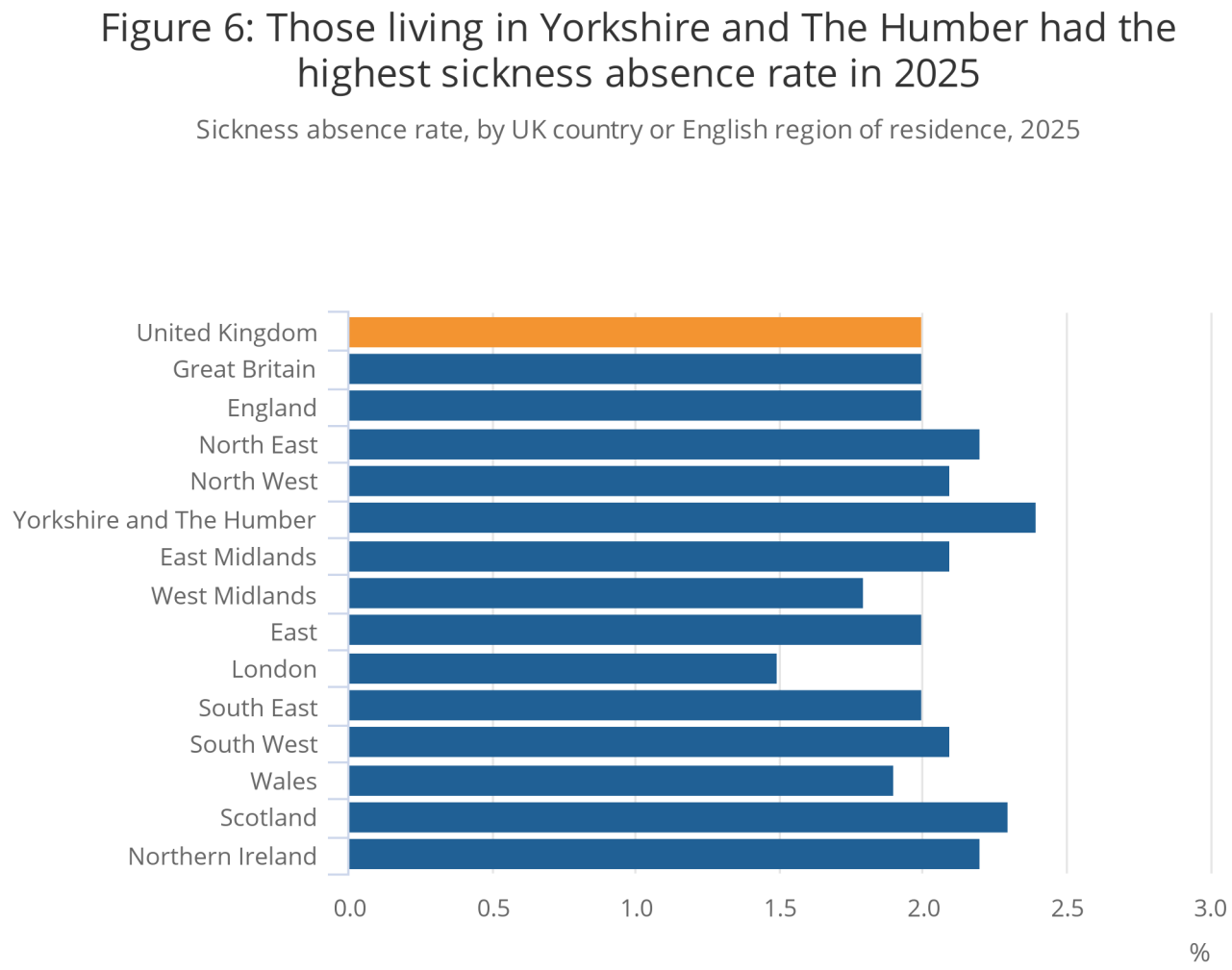
Workers living in Yorkshire and The Humber had the highest sickness absence rate in 2025, at 2.4% (Figure 6). Those living in London had the lowest rate, at 1.5%, which was 0.3 percentage points lower than the next lowest region (West Midlands at 1.8%).

The regions with the largest increase in sickness absence rate were the East of England and the North East, which each saw an increase of 0.5 percentage points. The region with the largest decrease in sickness absence rate was Wales, with a 0.4 percentage point decrease.

The low sickness absence rate in London can largely be explained by the younger age profile of workers living in the region, and their occupation types. There is also a large concentration of high-skilled jobs in London, which tend to be associated with lower rates of sickness absence.

Figure 6: Those living in Yorkshire and The Humber had the highest sickness absence rate in 2025

Sickness absence rate, by UK country or English region of residence, 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

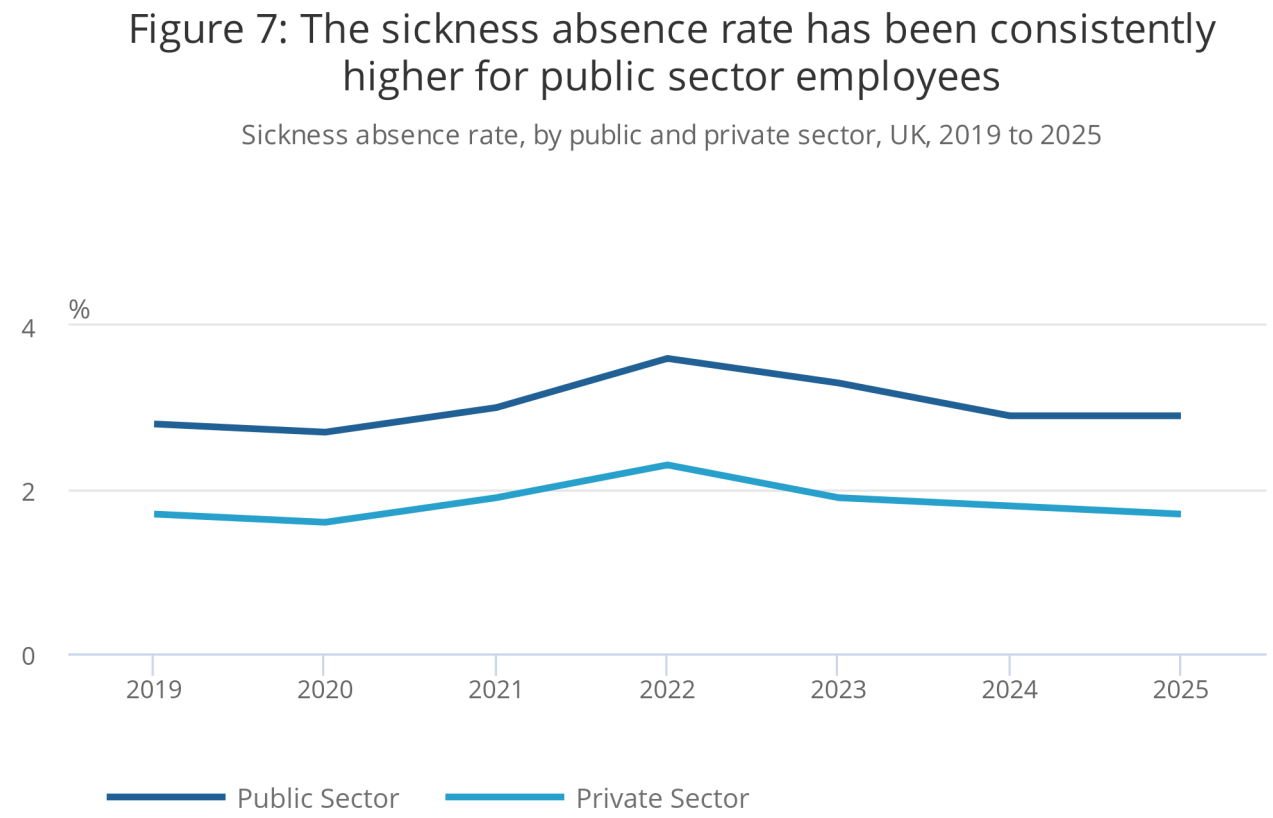
The sickness absence rate was 2.9% for public sector employees and 1.7% for those working in the private sector. Compared with 2024, the sickness absence rate for the public sector remained unchanged, while there was a 0.1 percentage point decrease in the private sector. The sickness absence rate for the private sector is unchanged from the 2019 rate, whereas the public sector rate was 0.1 percentage points higher.

Sickness absence rates for public sector workers have been higher than those in the private sector for every year on record. There are several factors to consider when examining the differences between the public and private sectors, including:

- that there are differences in the types of jobs between the sectors, some of which have higher likelihoods of sickness than others
- that workers in the private sector are less likely to be paid for sickness absence than those in the public sector
- that the analysis only counts people as sick if they work fewer hours than they are contracted for, and would exclude those who make up lost hours at a later point in the week; individuals in smaller workforces, which are more prominent in the private sector, may be under more pressure to make up any lost hours, but no data are collected on hours made up following sickness absence

Figure 7: The sickness absence rate has been consistently higher for public sector employees

Sickness absence rate, by public and private sector, UK, 2019 to 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

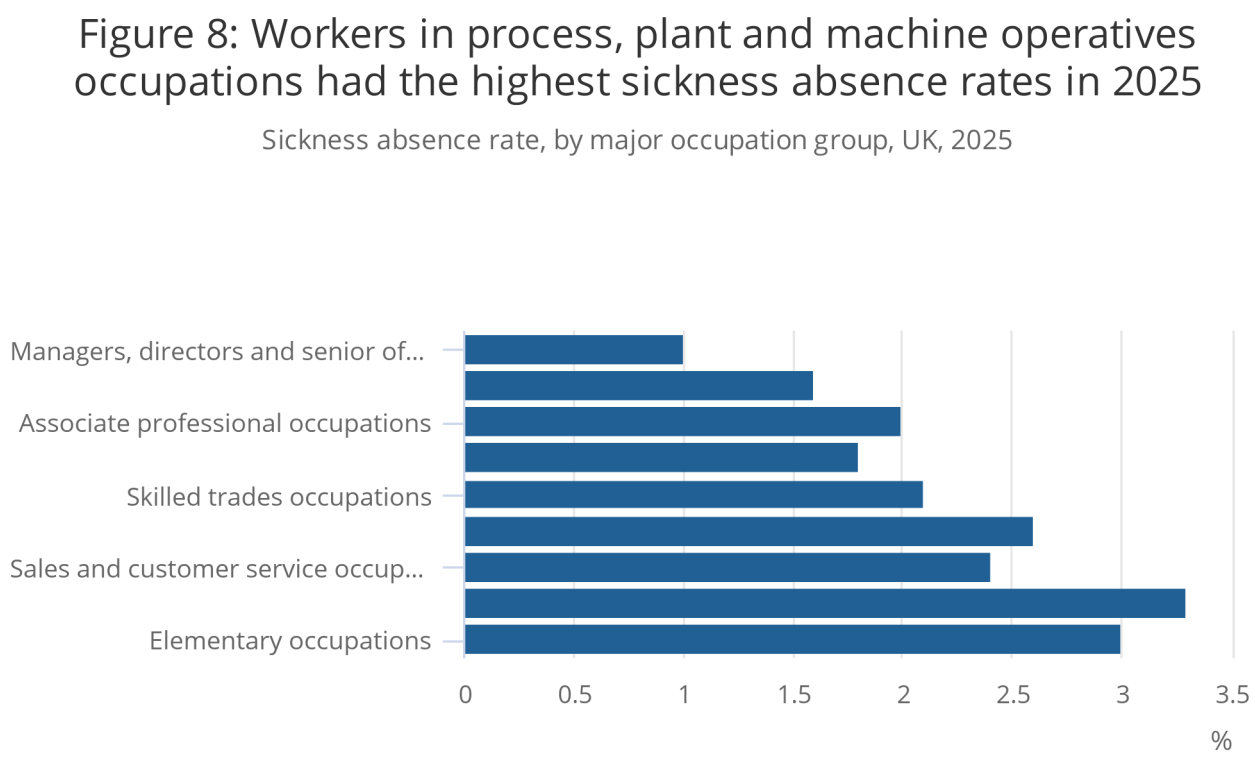
Notes:

1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

Workers in process, plant and machine operatives occupations had the highest sickness absence rate in 2025, at 3.3%. Managers, directors and senior officials had the lowest rate, at 1.0%.

Figure 8: Workers in process, plant and machine operatives occupations had the highest sickness absence rates in 2025

Sickness absence rate, by major occupation group, UK, 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

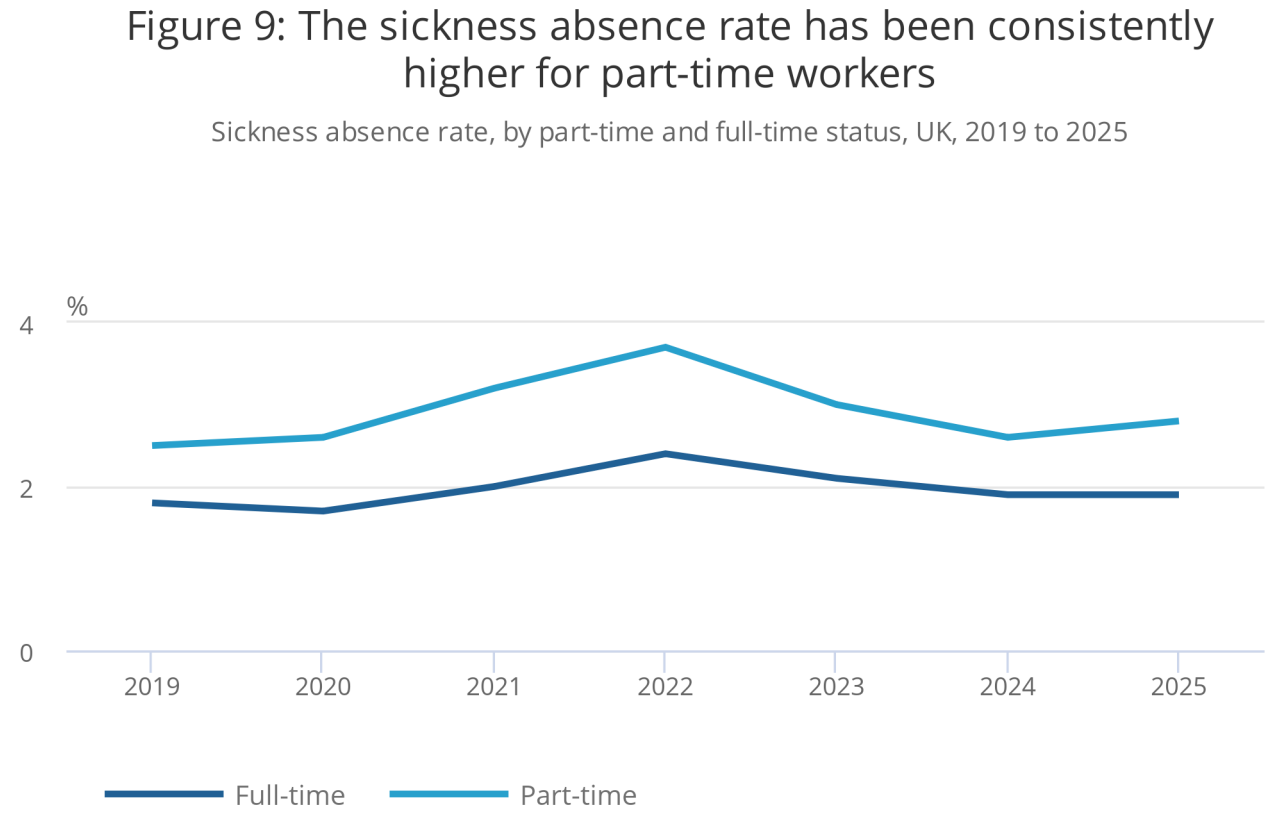
1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

The sickness absence rate for part-time workers in 2025 was 2.8%, and 1.9% for full-time workers. the rate for part-time workers increased by 0.2 percentage points, while the rate for full-time workers showed no change from 2024. The gap between full-time and part-time sickness absence rate has increased by 0.2 percentage points in 2025 compared with 2024.

The sickness absence rate for part-time workers has been consistently higher than the sickness absence rate for full-time workers. This is partly because women tend to have higher rates of sickness absence and many part-time workers are women. The types of jobs typically done part time are also associated with higher rates of sickness absence.

Figure 9: The sickness absence rate has been consistently higher for part-time workers

Sickness absence rate, by part-time and full-time status, UK, 2019 to 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Increased volatility of LFS estimates resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes means that estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

5 . Data on sickness absence in the UK labour market

Sickness absence in the UK labour market
Dataset | Released 1 May 2026
Annual sickness absence rates of workers in the UK labour market. These are official statistics in development.

6 . Glossary

COVID-19

The name used to refer to the disease caused by the SARS CoV-2 virus, which is a type of coronavirus. The Office for National Statistics takes COVID-19 to mean presence of SARS-CoV-2 with or without symptoms.

Definitions of reason for sickness absence

- "Musculoskeletal problems" includes back pain, neck and upper limb problems, and other musculoskeletal problems.
- "Other" includes the total number of days lost to accidents, poisonings, infectious diseases, skin disorders, diabetes and anything else not covered.
- From April 2020, interviewers were advised to code any mention of coronavirus (COVID-19) as "other", however, it is believed people could self-report this in "minor illnesses" or "respiratory conditions".
- "Mental health conditions" includes stress, depression, anxiety and serious mental health problems.
- "Minor illnesses" includes coughs, colds, flu, sickness, nausea and diarrhoea.
- "Long COVID" may fall under any of the main categories if relevant, as long COVID can present differently and so is wide ranging; however, it could also be coded to "other" as it often presents in the same way as many other viruses do, once the active viral infection has passed, despite being given its own specific name.

Furlough

A temporary absence from work allowing workers to keep their jobs during the coronavirus pandemic.

Number of days lost per worker

The number of days lost per worker is proportional to the number of days lost divided by the number of people in employment aged 16 years and over.

The total number of days lost because of sickness or injury, and the number of days lost per worker both saw a significant fall in 2020. The data that feed into the total number of days lost, and days lost per worker, include furloughed workers. Therefore, some of this fall will be because fewer people were in work and taking days off because of sickness or injury.

In addition, those employed but on furlough are included in the denominator for the number of days lost per worker, as they are defined as in employment, but would not be contributing to the numerator as they are away from work.

Sickness absence rate

Sickness absence rate is proportional to the total hours lost because of sickness or injury divided by total hours multiplied by 100, as seen in the following equation:

$$Sickness\ absence\ rate = \frac{Total\ hours\ lost\ due\ to\ sickness\ or\ injury}{Total\ Hours} \times 100$$

$$Total\ hours = Total\ actual\ hours\ \ (for\ those\ with\ no\ sickness\ absence)$$

$$Number\ of\ days\ lost = \frac{Hours\ lost\ due\ to\ sickness\ or\ injury\ \times 52}{7.5}$$

$$Number\ of\ days\ lost\ per\ worker = \frac{Number\ of\ days\ lost}{Number\ of\ persons\ in\ employment,\ aged\ 16+}$$

The sickness absence rate will not be affected by furloughed workers in the same way as number of days lost in 2020 and 2021. This is derived as the total hours lost as a proportion of total hours worked. Neither the hours-lost, nor the hours-worked measures include those on furlough, therefore this measure should still be comparable over time. Since this measure is least affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic policies, it is therefore the most appropriate measure to use for sickness absence analysis to ensure comparability over time.

Working day

The working day is defined as 7 hours and 30 minutes.

7 . Data sources and quality

The estimates included in this release have been produced using the Labour Force Survey (LFS). They relate to people aged 16 years and over in employment and are for the whole of the UK.

Estimates are based on annual averages across quarters for each calendar year, taking an average of the January to March, April to June, July to September, and October to December datasets.

LFS sickness absence estimates are weighted to 2022 mid-year population estimates for periods from 2019; the sickness absence data, therefore, have a discontinuity at this point.

Quality

For many years, household surveys both in the UK and in comparable countries have been facing the challenge of falling response rates. Coupled with challenges in collecting and processing survey data since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, quality concerns became acute for LFS data collected in 2023. This led to the suspension of releases using LFS data, as discussed in our Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: 2024 article.

In response to these concerns, we made several changes to the operation and processing of LFS data in late 2023 and early 2024. LFS estimates from January to March 2025 include the full effect of the improvements in data collection and sampling methods introduced from January 2024. However, since then, we have increased the number of interviewers for the LFS, which has continued to increase the number of responses to the survey.

Consequently, estimates may be subject to the effect of these further improvements, which may have an ongoing impact on the survey. An increased volatility will remain in the LFS estimates for mid-2023 and throughout 2024, so we would advise additional caution when interpreting survey change measures.

More quality and methodology information

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in ourLFS Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report.

Official statistics in development

These statistics are labelled as "official statistics in development". Until September 2023, these were called "experimental statistics". Read more about the change in our Guide to official statistics in development.

8 . Related links

Employment in the UK: April 2026
Bulletin | Released 21 April 2026
Estimates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity for the UK.

Labour Force Survey quality update: April 2026
Article | Released 21 April 2026
Assessment of Labour Force Survey data quality, including the impact of recent changes on the statistics, response levels and rates, and respondent characteristics.

9 . Cite this article

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