

Guidance for Employers & Organizations
Eliminating Sick Notes for Short-Term
Absence Verification



We’ve heard clearly that Manitoba businesses and organizations greatly value strong health services and want to ensure care is there for those who need it.

With a severe physician shortage, it’s important for everyone to do their part to free up access for patients. Sick notes are a leading cause of wasted physician time. While each individual note may only take a few minutes for a doctor to write, with hundreds of thousands of notes per year it really adds up. Eliminating sick notes can free up more than 300,000 appointments per year.

Doctors Manitoba is leading an effort to eliminate the use of sick notes in Manitoba. In addition to consuming physician time, research has shown they also aren’t an effective tool to manage absenteeism. There’s a better way, and this guide will help you transition away from sick notes to verify short-term illness and injury in your organization.





Your organization can have an immediate and meaningful impact by eliminating your sick note requirements for short-term illness verification.

Sick notes and other types of doctors’ notes

A sick note is a document to verify an illness or injury resulting in a short-term absence from work, school or other institution. Sick notes serve the sole purpose of verification.

Sick notes do not refer to instances where medical advice is important and necessary, such as accommodation or return-to-work documentation, or requirements related to insurance coverage and benefits. These are examples of other doctors’ notes or medical certificates.

Why eliminate sick notes in your organization?

-  **They don’t work.** Sick notes aren’t effective for verifying illness, as patients often don’t have symptoms left to check by the time they see a doctor. They are a false form of verification.
-  **They risk workplace infections.** People with minor illnesses or injuries often just need to stay home to rest and recover – not risk infecting others at work or in clinic waiting rooms. Research shows 82% of workers would rather go to work sick than get a sick note.
-  **They are a productivity drag.** Eliminating sick notes can help boost productivity by avoiding the spread of infections in the workplace, as well as improve employee engagement.
-  **They come at a high cost.** Doctors appointments just to get a sick note add up, costing tax payers over \$8 million per year and reducing access for patients with real medical issues. Eliminating sick notes would free up over 300,000 patient visits per year, the equivalent of adding more than 50 doctors.

Eliminating Sick Notes is Good for Everyone:		
Good for Manitobans	Good for Employers	Good for Doctors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Better access to care✓ Rest and recover when sick✓ Eliminate hassle and expense of getting sick notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Improved productivity✓ Better employee engagement and trust✓ Shift to better and proven methods to manage absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Reduced administrative burden✓ More time for patient care✓ Less spread of illness

Recommended Action in Your Organization

The following tips have been created with the help of HR experts as well as a review of leading human resource practices at organizations that have already eliminated sick notes.

You can help today by eliminating the use of sick notes to verify illness or injury:

- ✓ **Remove sick notes** as an option or requirement from internal policies and procedures.
- ✓ **Update contracts**, employee handbooks and other documents.
- ✓ **Communicate** the change clearly and widely.
- ✓ **Sign up for information.** Doctors Manitoba will be releasing a comprehensive toolkit with resources for employers, including sample sick leave policies and self-attestation forms.
- ✓ **Reach out.** Has your organization already eliminated sick notes, or do you plan to take action? We'd love to hear from you and profile your efforts that will improve health care for all Manitobans.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. How do I verify an absence without a sick note?

Sick notes provide a false verification as workers often no longer have symptoms when they see a physician. Alternatives like self-certification offer equal or better assurance, providing documentation to address misuse while reducing unnecessary doctor visits:

- **Trust for Short Absences:** Instead of requiring a sick note, trust employees to take sick leave when needed, unless there's clear misuse. This builds a positive workplace culture.
- **Self-Attestation Forms:** Employees can fill out a simple form confirming their illness, which serves as a record for tracking absences and addressing misuse.
- **Flexible Sick Leave:** Allowing employees to take sick days or wellness days without needing proof reduces stress, keeps workplaces healthier, and improves retention. It also helps to avoid having sick employees in the workplace who risk infecting others.
- **Focus on Suspicious Patterns:** If an employee frequently calls in sick around holidays or shows a pattern of misuse, investigate it by having a check-in conversation, or by asking for reasonable proof such as a pharmacy receipt.

2. When should I ask for a sick note?

Eliminating sick notes for simply verifying short-term absences is the ideal practice. Major employers have already eliminated sick notes completely, or have implemented policies such as eliminating sick notes for absences of 10 consecutive workdays. Consider when it's appropriate to encourage the individual to seek medical care, including for short leaves that start to extend beyond the two-week mark.

3. Can we still ask for medical advice for other purposes?

Yes. Doctors Manitoba recommends the elimination of sick notes to solely verify a short-term absence. This does not preclude requesting medical information to support an accommodation, a safe return to work, or seeking advice about supporting an ongoing or chronic medical condition that may result in frequent or recurring absences.

Managing sick time and employee absences is a part of running a business. By shifting toward trust-based, data-driven, and wellness-focused attendance management, employers can build healthier workplaces, improve service delivery, and support the well-being of both employees and the broader community. Thank you for your important role in supporting the health and well-being of your employees and for contributing to improved services for all.

Access more guidance
and resources at

