

# Managing Leaves of Absence During Peak Vacation Season



For many organizations, summer is one of the busiest and most challenging times of year for workforce management. While employees look forward to vacations, time off, and family commitments, employers must balance staffing needs, operational continuity, and employee wellbeing. At the same time, organizations may also experience an increase in leaves of absence related to illness, caregiving responsibilities, mental health concerns, or workplace injuries.

Managing leaves of absence during peak vacation season requires careful planning, clear communication, and consistent policies. Employers who proactively prepare for overlapping absences are better positioned to reduce disruption, maintain productivity, and support employee wellness without overburdening remaining staff.

## **Understanding Different Types of Leaves**

Vacation requests are only one part of summer workforce planning. Employers may also need to manage a variety of protected or approved leaves of absence, depending on employment standards legislation and workplace policies.

**Vacation leave** is typically the most common summer absence. Employees often request extended time off during school holidays, long weekends, or travel season. Organizations may see multiple overlapping requests within the same department or team.

**Medical leave** may increase during summer months due to injuries, stress, burnout, or ongoing health conditions. Employers should remember that employees are generally entitled to privacy regarding medical details, and managers should avoid requesting unnecessary information.

**Family or caregiving leave** may also become more common during school breaks, particularly for employees caring for children, elderly parents, or family members with health concerns.

**Mental health-related absences** can occur year-round, but workplace stress caused by staffing shortages, increased workloads, or poor work-life balance may contribute to higher levels of burnout during busy vacation periods.

In seasonal industries such as construction, hospitality, tourism, recreation, and

agriculture, employers may also need to navigate absences while onboarding temporary or inexperienced workers, adding another layer of operational complexity.

## Why Summer Leave Management Matters

Poorly managed absences can have significant consequences for both organizations and employees. When staffing gaps are not properly addressed, workloads often shift to remaining employees, increasing stress, fatigue, and the risk of errors or workplace incidents.

Managers who respond inconsistently to leave requests may also create perceptions of unfairness or favoritism, damaging morale and workplace culture. Employees who feel unsupported or pressured to avoid taking leave may experience reduced engagement and higher burnout risk.

Effective leave management helps organizations:

- Maintain operational continuity
- Reduce scheduling conflicts
- Support employee wellbeing
- Improve morale and retention
- Ensure compliance with employment standards
- Minimize disruption to customer service and productivity.

A proactive approach also allows employers to identify patterns, anticipate staffing shortages, and develop contingency plans before problems escalate.

## Creating Clear Leave Policies

One of the most important tools for managing summer absences is a clear and consistently applied leave policy. Employees should understand how vacation requests are submitted, approved, and prioritized well before peak season begins.

Policies should clearly outline:

- Vacation request deadlines
- Blackout periods, if applicable
- Approval processes
- Expectations for shift coverage or handovers
- Procedures for unexpected absences
- Requirements for medical documentation where legally appropriate
- Communication expectations during leave

Transparency is essential. Employees are more likely to accept scheduling limitations if policies are communicated early and applied fairly across the organization.

Employers should also avoid overly rigid policies that discourage employees from taking time off. Rest and recovery are important components of workplace wellness, and organizations that support healthy work-life balance often experience stronger engagement and productivity overall.

## Planning Ahead for Staffing Challenges

Successful leave management starts with forecasting. Employers should review historical vacation trends, busy periods, project timelines, and operational demands to identify where staffing pressures may arise.

Cross-training employees can help organizations maintain coverage when multiple workers are absent. When staff members understand several roles or responsibilities, managers have greater flexibility when adjusting schedules or redistributing workloads.

Temporary staffing solutions may also help during peak vacation periods. Seasonal employees, contract workers, or part-time staff can provide additional support when permanent employees are away. However, employers should ensure temporary workers receive proper onboarding, supervision, and health and safety training.

Managers should also monitor workloads carefully. Employees who remain at work during peak vacation periods may experience increased pressure, longer hours, or role strain. Regular check-ins, realistic expectations, and manageable workloads can help reduce stress and prevent burnout.

## **Communication Is Key**

Open communication can significantly reduce tension around leave scheduling. Employees should feel comfortable discussing time-off requests early, especially when they involve major travel plans or caregiving responsibilities.

Managers should communicate decisions promptly and explain any limitations or scheduling conflicts respectfully. When requests cannot be accommodated, employers should explore alternative options where possible rather than simply denying leave outright.

It is also important for managers to model healthy behaviour around time off. Leaders who avoid vacations or regularly work while on leave may unintentionally create pressure for employees to remain constantly available.

## **Common Leave Management Mistakes to Avoid**

One of the most common mistakes employers make is handling leave requests on a first-come, first-served basis without considering fairness, operational needs, or employee wellbeing. While seniority or timing may play a role, organizations should avoid approaches that consistently disadvantage certain employees or teams.

Another trap is failing to plan for overlapping absences. Waiting until schedules become unmanageable can lead to rushed decisions, understaffing, and increased stress for everyone involved.

Employers should also avoid inconsistent enforcement of policies. Approving exceptions for some employees while denying similar requests for others can create conflict and damage trust.

Finally, organizations should avoid stigmatizing medical or mental health-related absences. Employees should feel supported when accessing legitimate leave entitlements without fear of judgment or retaliation.

When employers approach leave management with fairness, empathy, and proactive planning, they can better support both operational needs and employee wellness during the busiest vacation months of the year.