

## Introduction

### 1. Aim of the guidance

**1.1** Leeds City Council is committed to the wellbeing of its employees and to school staff in Leeds and aims to support Headteachers and line managers to create an environment where those who are experiencing the menopause feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support at work.

**1.2** The purpose of this guidance is to raise awareness of menopause-related symptoms and to provide advice to Headteachers, line managers and school staff on how to reduce the effect of these symptoms at work.

**1.3** We want to support schools to create an environment where employees can talk openly and without embarrassment. The menopause needs to be normalised where people feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support and feel able to request reasonable adjustments at work.

### 2. Terminology

**2.1** Although the majority of people who experience the menopause will identify as women, other people - for example trans, non-binary and intersex people - may also experience the menopause. We have used the terms 'women' and 'people who experience the menopause' throughout the guidance but this guidance is inclusive of all people who experience the menopause and applies to everyone.

**2.2** Menopause: the point at which an individual's oestrogen levels decline, and they stop having periods. Menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years so it's best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

**2.3** Perimenopause: this is the phase leading up to the menopause when a person's hormone balance starts to change, and when they may begin to experience menopausal symptoms. For some, this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their late forties.

### **3. Why this guidance is needed**

**3.1** Women and people who experience the menopause are aged usually between the ages of 45 to 55, though some people can experience it at other times, due to 'premature menopause', transitioning or surgery. Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically different for everyone; and for a quarter of women and people who experience the menopause they are severely debilitating. Symptoms can have a huge effect on comfort and performance when working.

**3.2** There are around 4.3 million women in employment in the UK aged 50 years and over, most of whom will experience the menopause and its symptoms. "It is estimated that 13 million or around 1 in 3 women are either currently going through or have reached the menopause". (Dr Caroline De Bruin, Public Health England Aug 2019)

**3.3** According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), three out of five working women aged between 45 to 55 who are experiencing menopause symptoms say it has a negative impact on them at work.

**3.4** The CIPD and YouGov surveyed 1,409 women experiencing menopause symptoms (March 2019). Of those who were negatively affected by the symptoms at work, they reported the following issues:

- nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) said they were less able to concentrate
- more than half (58 per cent) said they experienced more stress
- more than half (52 per cent) said they felt less patient with clients and colleagues
- nearly a third (30 per cent) said they had taken sick leave but had not felt able to say the real reason for their absence

### **4. Our commitment to wellbeing**

#### **4.1**

**4.1** We recognise that staff may, at any time, have health issues which may impact on, or be made worse by work. As an inclusive employer we have a commitment to supporting a culture whereby staff feel able to bring their whole self to work; through encouraging open discussion and a management style which recognises that it's okay not to be okay.

**4.2** It is important that Headteachers and line managers engage in regular wellbeing conversations with members of their team, putting in additional support where necessary.

## **5. What staff may need to be aware of**

**5.1** Each person experiencing the menopause will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families, and colleagues as well.

**5.2** Experiences and perceptions of the menopause may also differ in relation to disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or marital or civil partnership status. It is important to recognise that for many reasons, people's individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. It is particularly important that no assumptions are made by managers about who or how the menopause may impact.

**5.3** The school recognises that for many reasons, people's individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly.

**5.4** Symptoms vary greatly and commonly include, but are not limited to:

- night sweats
- anxiety
- dizziness
- fatigue
- memory loss
- depression
- headaches
- recurrent urinary tract infections
- joint stiffness, aches, and pains
- reduced concentration
- hot flushes
- heavy periods

## **6. How this guidance can be put into practice**

**6.1** The menopause is a very individual experience, and people can be affected in different ways and to different degrees, therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed. Minor adjustments to an employee's working environment can make a huge difference.

If an employee is experiencing menopausal symptoms, the options in the following sections are available.

### **6.2 Flexible working**

It is important to recognise that flexibility is key to anyone suffering because of transitioning

through the menopause and employers should aim to facilitate flexible working wherever possible.

Full information on flexible working options can be found in the Flexible Working Guidance for School Based Staff, a copy of which can be requested from the Leeds City Council Schools HR team.

Should an employee require a more temporary or flexible change to their working arrangements examples to consider could include:

- flexible working hours
- reduced hours
- time off for appointments (HRT treatments): for further guidance please refer to Schools Leave of Absence and Annual Leave Policy and Procedure, sections 3.6 and 3.8
- agree for them to sit near a window or in a ventilated area or provide a desk-based fan if they become too hot
- agree temporary adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge

These should be discussed and agreed with the employee's line manager/Headteacher and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure these adjustments continue to meet the needs of the employee.

### **6.3 Clothing**

- use of natural fibres wherever possible
- flexibility within dress codes should they exacerbate symptoms such as hot flushes and sweating,
- changing and washing facilities for staff to change clothes during the working day

### **6.3 Risk assessments and reasonable adjustments**

Someone with menopausal symptoms should be supported in the same way as an employee with any ongoing health conditions. Small adjustments to someone's job or working pattern can help people manage their symptoms and continue to perform well in their role. The individual is usually best placed to recognise what might help them, so Headteachers/line managers are encouraged to have open conversations with members of staff.

Headteachers or line managers should ensure all employees undergo a risk assessment to ensure working conditions do not exacerbate a person's symptoms to identify any adjustments that could help an employee perform to their full potential. In addition to any risk assessment it is also advised that Headteachers and managers undertake a Wellbeing Action Support Plan (WASP) with an employee.

## **6.5 Sickness absence**

Menopausal absence should be supported in line with the Schools Managing Attendance Policy and Guidance. Where staff are experiencing absence related to the menopause, adjustments should be offered to resolve any barriers that the employee may be experiencing to support to remain in work. The Equality Act 2010 may apply, depending on the severity of symptoms and/or impact on daily life.

## **6.6 Occupational Health**

The role of Occupational Health is to:

- carry out an assessment of the employee to ascertain whether the working environment may be exacerbating menopause symptoms, or their condition or symptoms are impacting on the performance within their job role
- discuss with the employee what adjustments would help
- signpost to other appropriate sources of support and advice

## **6. Employee Assistance**

School staff can access this service by calling 03303 800658 or by visiting [the Vivup website](#). The telephone service is confidential & support is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The website also contains advice and guidance on various wellbeing topics.

## **6.8 Performance**

It is important for Headteachers and managers to support employees regarding performance issues relating to the menopause and in doing so they should access the School Teacher Appraisal and Capability Policy, where teachers require additional support.

Support staff should also receive regular support and management to enable discussions to take place that help resolve performance related issues linked to menopause.

The menopause and its symptoms can have a long term impact and affects everyone differently, therefore performance issues must be handled sensitively, taking into account reasonable adjustments that may be required to support performance at work.

## 7. Support

The following identifies schools responsibilities as employers, staff and line managers.

### 7.1 Headteachers/Line managers should:

- ensure they are aware of the support available and the terms of this guidance
- signpost staff to their GP to discuss treatment options
- ensure all members of their team are aware of the referenced policies and where to find information and seek support
- be responsible for managing absence and keeping in touch if someone is off work ill or because of their menopausal symptoms, as well as supporting an effective return to work
- ensure they listen to the needs of each employee individually and are open and willing to have discussions around the menopause, ensuring confidentiality where requested by the employee
- work together with the employee to ensure that the right support is provided that satisfies both the school and the employee's needs
- ensure regular check-ins are in place to review any support and make any necessary changes to an employee's working environment or patterns that are required from both the school and the employee's perspective.

### 7.2 Employees should:

- contact their GP to discuss treatment options
- raise awareness of menopause symptoms and become familiar with the terms of this guidance. Understand what information is available. Seek advice and guidance from available support provided and support colleagues
- be as open and honest as possible with line managers – reviewing and working through the available options together to ensure appropriate measures which support their working environment are in place

Agree to keep their Headteacher/ line manager informed to ensure that the right support is being provided. If employees feel uncomfortable in discussing personal issues relating to the menopause in the workplace they can speak to their GP or contact one of the organisations detailed below in Section 8

### 7.3 Training and awareness

Advice can be sought from Occupational Health, the Schools HR Team and the Health and Safety team on the implementation and interpretation of this guidance. The Schools HR Team is committed to delivering training and awareness sessions for staff and managers including

facilitating menopause cafes to provide a discussion forum for employees experiencing symptoms, their colleagues, and managers.

## 7.4 General support

Schools should aim to facilitate an open, understanding working environment and so we encourage employees to inform their line manager that they are experiencing menopausal symptoms at an early stage to ensure that symptoms are treated, and the necessary support made available.

Employees who do not wish to discuss the issue with their Headteacher or line manager may find it helpful to have an initial discussion with:

- a trusted colleague
- the Employee Assistance provider, Vivup
- the Occupational Health team
- a Mental Health First Aider

## 8. Useful resources

The school is not responsible for the content of external websites so information available through the following links should be used as a guide only:

- [Menopause matters](#), which provides information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms, and treatment options
- The [Daisy Network charity](#), which provides support for people experiencing premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency
- The external [Menopause Café](#), which provides information about events where strangers gather to eat cake, drink tea, and discuss the menopause
- [Henpicked](#), an online community that gives people a place to have their say, promote healthy debate and bring about positive change. They also provide 'lunch and learn' videos with industry wide experts
- [MegsMenopause](#), an 'honest and frank' look at all things menopause
- [A guide to managing menopause at work: guidance for line managers \(cipd.co.uk\)](#), offers guidance on supporting employees going through the menopause, including how to approach the conversations about it appropriately and sensitively