

When You Call In For Sick Leave

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Almost every postal employee has occasion to call in for sick leave. And when we do call in, we can almost always anticipate being asked a series of questions by the person taking our call. The questions can run the gamut: Name?

Social Security Number?

Phone Number?

What type of leave are you requesting?

Is this absence job related?

How many days do you expect to be gone?

Are you requesting FMLA?

The following is a short list of what you need to know about calling in—especially under the new time attendance system (TACS), and the procedures being implemented in accordance with TACS. It is absolutely crucial that you are aware of these provisions and I would recommend you keep a copy of this article available in case you should ever have to call in. Also, check your break rooms and union bulletin boards over the next few months; additional information on this subject will be available there, as well as follow-up articles that provide more information.

The bottom line is that in those offices with an Attendance Control Officer (a supervisor who is in charge of all call-ins), those managers are specifically trained to, in a roundabout way, "convince" you to handle your absence request in a way that will benefit Management and not necessarily you!

1. Do not argue or be hostile with the person taking the call. Be aware, however, that some of the questions are designed to trick you and/or to get you to state things that are not in your best interest.
2. Ask the name of the person taking the call. Write it down and provide that information to the steward if you should have to file any grievances.
3. Listen carefully to the questions asked. If you are not sure how to answer the questions or do not know what is being asked, make that clear. An answer of "I do not know" is perfectly legitimate.
4. If you do not wish to do so, you are not required to provide your phone number! The only information you are required to have on file with the postal service is your home address. If you choose not to provide your phone number and are notified you must call your immediate supervisor back, then do so.
5. If you do not provide your number and your supervisor calls you back anyway, make a note of that, and tell your supervisor to not call you at home again—that you are trying to recuperate and the interruptions are not only distracting your recuperation, but calling you without your permission is a form of harassment.
6. If you are sick, then when you are asked

what type of leave you are requesting, state you are requesting sick leave.

7. If you are asked anything like "are you able to perform any of your postal duties," the most appropriate reply is that you are incapacitated for duty. You do not have to be near death to be eligible to take sick leave! Nor do you, for that matter, have to be *at home* in order to become sick.
8. If you are asked any questions regarding the nature of the absence, be careful to **not** state anything to do with diagnosis or prognosis (identification of an illness or a forecast of the impact of the illness). Also, unless your absence is specifically stress related, do not state you are stressed out! Making such statements may require you to seek medical attention that you otherwise would not have to seek.
9. If you are asked whether you have seen a doctor, do not state you are *planning on* doing so, unless you actually intend to do so.
10. If you are asked whether you are *planning on* seeing a doctor, do not state "yes." Simply say that if you are not feeling better that you *might* see one.
11. If you are notified you have to get a doctor's note and you have not been absent for more than 3 days or are not on restricted sick leave, ask *why* you are being required to get a doctor's note. Do not become argumentative—just make a simple inquiry and then write down what you are told, and provide that information to your steward upon your return to work.
12. If you are not on restricted sick leave, or are not calling in for more than 3 consecutive days, you cannot be required to provide medical certification, except under very specific circumstances. If you are required to provide medical certification and you do not fit these parameters, ask to see a steward when you return to work and file a grievance. BUT, be sure to **obtain** the requested medical certification and keep notes on how long it took you to get to and from your doctor's office, how long you waited at the office, and keep receipts from the doctor's office concerning how much you had to pay to obtain the note. Also, when you return to work with the medical certification, *do not provide it to your supervisor*. Make a copy for yourself and turn the note in to the medical unit. Management is not entitled to a copy of this medical information!
13. If you have been absent for more than 3 days during a 90 day period, but not for more than 3 *consecutive* days, you should not be required to bring in a doctor's note. Again, however, if you are so told, get the doctor's note and follow the instructions above concerning the amount of time used and costs of obtaining the note.
14. When you are asked how many days you expect to be absent, be aware of one thing: unless you are a doctor, yourself, you probably are not going to be able to answer that question definitively! I would suggest that you simply state that you will hope to be well as soon as possible and if all goes well you will be back to work the next work day, and leave it at that. If you need to call in additional days, do so.
15. When you are asked if the absence is FMLA, if you are not sure, state you are not sure, but it **might** be FMLA. Tell the person on the other end of the phone that you are not sure what FMLA is and ask for additional information. It is **Management's** responsibility to properly identify the leave as FMLA or not—not yours.

There are a number of things you must be mindful of, too, when you return to work.

1. If you are provided a 3971 that has been partially filled out, check the information very carefully. If any of the information that has been filled out is incorrect, insist on filling out a new one and *do not sign the first 3971!* If the 3971 is correct but incomplete, be sure to fill out the 3971 *completely* and *only then* should you sign it.
2. If when you return, you have to wait to get your badge and that causes you to have to clock in late, see a steward—you are entitled to fill out postal forms and conduct postal business on the clock and a grievance should be filed so you are properly compensated.
3. If you were instructed to bring in a medical documentation and did not do so, explain why. Sometimes it is not possible to get an appointment to see your doctor on a moment's notice and you may have to schedule an appointment later on. Be aware, though, that if you were told to bring in a note that you are required to do so and to file a grievance later if you object to being told to bring one in in the first place.
4. If you brought a doctor's note in, but you turned in the note to the medical unit (as *should* be the case) notify your supervisor that that is what you did. If you are harassed about this matter by your supervisor, ask to see a steward and file a grievance.

As previously mentioned, this is just a "short list" of things you should be aware of when calling in for sick leave. And also as previously mentioned, check the union bulletin boards and break tables over the next few months for additional information on this subject. The more aware you are of the rules, the better off you are and the more you can remain protected from any actions against you by your supervisor.



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Instructions for calling in sick

1. Dial 1-866-227-9876 as soon as you are aware you are incapacitated.
2. Give your name and pay location and tell them you are calling in sick. Document the time you called and who you spoke with, then hang up.
3. You can call your supervisor, and be granted leave and not have to call the RMD office

Be aware that you are not required to do anything else. If by some misfortune you wind up speaking to a supervisor who wants to ask all kinds of questions than you should state the following:

**I AM TOO ILL TO PERFORM THE DUTIES OF MY POSITION!
I AM TOO ILL TO DISCUSS THIS WITH YOU AT THE MOMENT!
I WILL FOLLOW THE PROVISIONS OF SECTION 513 OF THE ELM.**

If the phone rings immediately after hanging up you have no obligation to answer any questions from your supervisor or manager.

Refuse to be intimidated!

If you are asked to submit documentation for 3 days or less, ask what kind of documentation you are being required to submit. If you are being required to submit medical documentation then comply with those instructions. Keep receipts and record mileage to and from doctor's office.

If you are told to call in every day, then comply and file a grievance.

Upon your return to work fill out your 3971 after you get on the clock. Do not sign the 3971 until the supervisor signs and approves your absence.

Request to see your union steward and file a grievance that you be compensated for:

1. The cost of the doctors visit.
2. Time spent at the doctor office.
3. Mileage to and from doctors office including parking fees.

If you are not told to bring in medical documentation prior to returning to work you cannot be obligated to submit medical documentation after the fact. If they do ask to see your union steward

Also be aware that you have the right to privacy concerning your illness and those only qualified medical personnel can access your restricted medical information. Supervisors, Managers, Postmasters or Plant Managers are NOT qualified medical personnel.