STIVEN CATALYST

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MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.



KPIS

SICK LEAVE: WHAT THE RATE HIDES

Why Germany's sick days jumped in 2022, why three sources give three numbers, why a few long absences make most of the days, what the electronic sick note changed, and the absence the rate does not show.

11.2 → 14.8

working days of sick leave per employee in Germany, 2021 to 2022; the electronic sick note explains part of the jump.

DESTATIS, 2026

INSIDE

COVER STORY
The jump of 2022
PAGE 03

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS
What the jump was made of
PAGE 06

TOOL OF THE ISSUE
The absence card
PAGE 08

NO. 92 · KPIS

In this issue

Sickness absence is one of the few people figures every company has, and it is often read as a sign of morale or discipline. This issue asks what the number actually counts, how Germany counts it, why it jumped in 2022, and what it leaves out.

Destatis puts sick leave at 11.2 working days per employee in 2021 and 14.8 in 2022, the year the sick note began to travel electronically from the doctor to the insurer. The insurers count in other units, so their figures differ. In TK's data, 3.6% of sick notes made 45.7% of the days. DAK's analysis traces much of the jump to more complete counting. And 62.5% of employees surveyed had worked while sick.

Stiven Janaqi EDITOR · STIVEN CATALYST

03 COVER STORY
The jump of 2022

04 THE NUMBERS
Three sources, three numbers

05 THE MODEL
Few long cases, most of the days

06 WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS
What the jump was made of

07 WHAT THE RATE HIDES
Present, but sick

08 TOOL OF THE ISSUE
The absence card

09 SOURCES
Sources and method

HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Figure
Every figure has its source and year at the foot of its page.

Our reading
Where the editor interprets rather than the research, it says so.

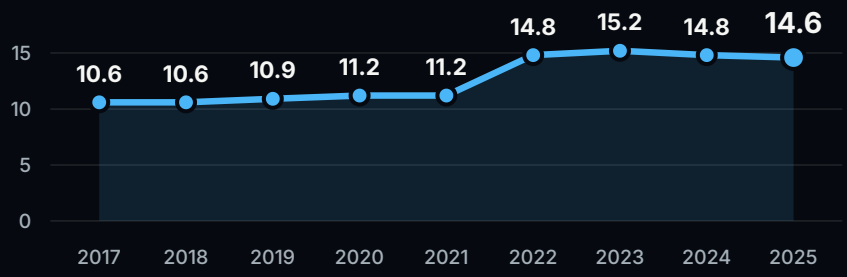
Practice
The steps and the card are proposals to try, not research results.

COVER STORY

The jump of 2022

For years employees in Germany were off sick for around 10 to 11 working days a year. In 2022 the figure rose to 14.8. That year the paper sick note began to give way: from January, practices switched one by one to sending it to the health insurer electronically.

WORKING DAYS OF SICK LEAVE PER EMPLOYEE, GERMANY (DESTATIS, 2026)



Before, employees sent the insurer its copy themselves. Asked in DAK's survey of 2024, 57.5% said they always had, 12.5% sometimes, 16.3% never. Destatis attributes the rise since 2021 partly to the electronic note, which records short absences more fully.

OUR READING

When the way of counting changes, the number moves even if nobody is sicker. Compare the years since 2022 with each other.

Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), nach der Arbeitszeitrechnung des IAB, 2026; Bundesministerium der Justiz, gesetze-im-internet.de, 1994; DAK-Gesundheit; Susanne Hildebrandt, Terese Dehl & Hans-Dieter Nolting, IGES Institut, 2025

Destatis, days lost per employee, from the IAB's working-time accounts; by its account only absences over three days are counted, so the true figure is likely higher. A note is due after three calendar days, or sooner if the employer asks (§ 5 EntgFG).

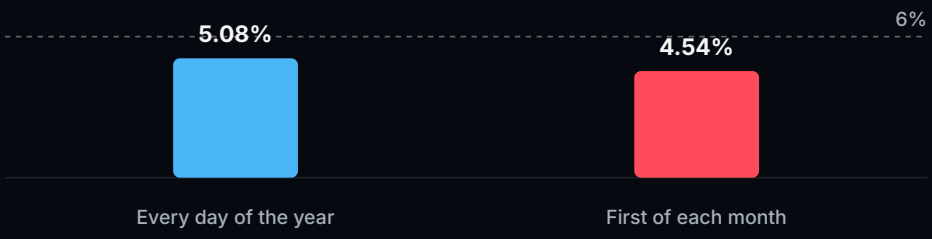
THE NUMBERS

Three sources, three numbers

Each source counts in its own way: working days or calendar days, employees or all insured people, every day of the year or one day a month. The figures cannot be set side by side without saying which.

01	**Destatis: 14.6 days (2025)**	working days lost per employee, from the IAB's working-time accounts
02	**TK: 18.5 days, 5.08% (2025)**	calendar days per insured year; members in work or on unemployment benefit; standardised by age and sex
03	**DAK: 5.4% (2024)**	the share off sick on an average calendar day: 1,967.4 days per 100 insured years over 366 days

TK'S RATE FOR 2025, COUNTED TWO WAYS (2026)



OUR READING

A higher figure from an insurer does not mean more sickness. Often it is another unit.

Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), nach der Arbeitszeitrechnung des IAB, 2026; Techniker Krankenkasse; Thomas Grobe & Sven Bessel, aQua-Institut, 2026; DAK-Gesundheit; Susanne Hildebrandt, Terese Dehl & Hans-Dieter Nolting, IGES Institut, 2025

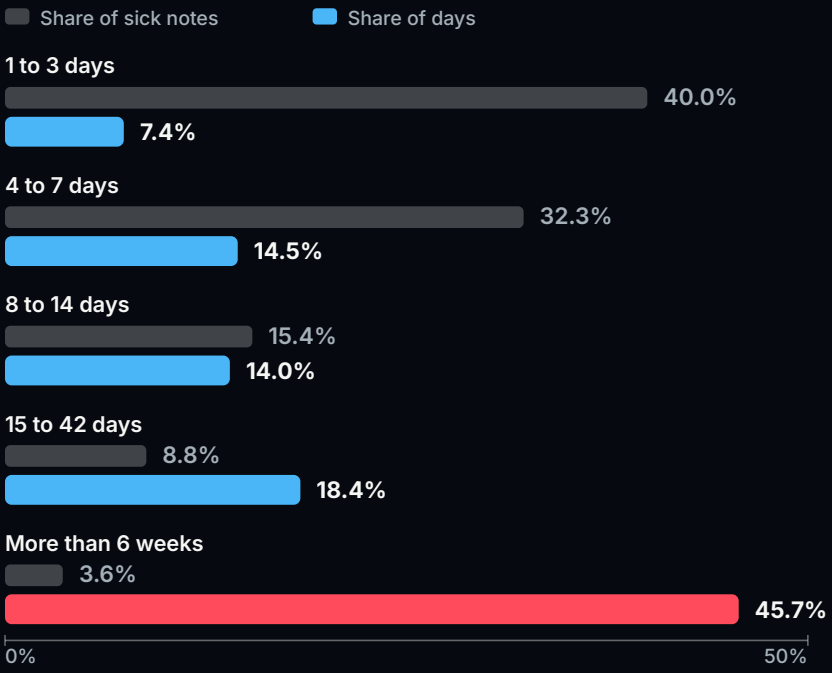
The health ministry's monthly statistic counts on the first of each month. TK recomputed its own data that way; in 2025 many of those days fell on weekends, holidays or days with low sickness, so the method came out low.

THE MODEL

Few long cases, most of the days

The rate is the number of sick notes times their average length, spread over the days of the year. Two teams can share the same rate, one with many short absences and one with a few long ones.

SICK NOTES BY LENGTH, TK MEMBERS, 2025 (2026)



OUR READING

Short absences disrupt the shift; long ones make the rate. They call for different answers: cover for the first, a way back to work for the second.

Sources: Techniker Krankenkasse; Thomas Grobe & Sven Bessel, aQua-Institut, 2026; Bundesministerium der Justiz, gesetze-im-internet.de, 1994; Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), nach der Arbeitszeitrechnung des IAB, 2026

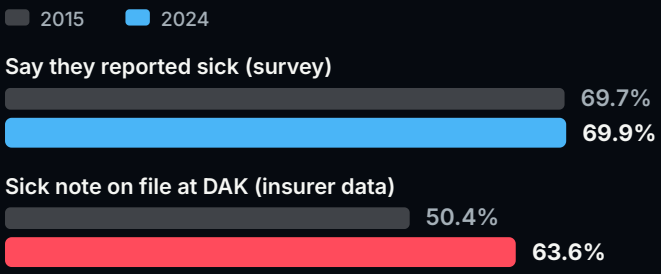
TK raw figures; the editors added 15–28 and 29–42 days into one row. Six weeks is where the employer's sick pay ends and the insurer's sickness benefit begins (§ 3 EntgFG). Notes of up to three days are counted incompletely.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

What the jump was made of

For its 2025 report DAK-Gesundheit had the IGES Institute take the jump apart. Its rate rose from 4.0% in 2021 to 5.5% in 2022. Of the extra sick notes, 94% lasted up to 14 days; they made 80% of the extra days.

EMPLOYEES WITH AT LEAST ONE SICK REPORT IN A YEAR: WHAT THEY SAY AND WHAT THE INSURER SAW (2025)



Colds (J06) made 35% of the extra days. Doctors did treat more of them: 20.1% of insured employees in late 2023, 9.7% in late 2019. That predicts notes for 8.8%; DAK received them for 13.8%. IGES puts 60% of that rise down to the electronic note, 40% to more treatment.

OUR READING

What employees say barely moved; what the insurer saw rose by 13 points. Much of the new sickness is old sickness, now counted.

Source: DAK-Gesundheit; Susanne Hildebrandt, Terese Dehl & Hans-Dieter Nolting, IGES Institut, 2025

DAK: 2.4 million members. Survey: 7,068 employees asked online by forsa in 2024, weighted to be representative, set beside DAK's survey of 2015. The 60:40 split is IGES's estimate for one diagnosis, J06, averaged over 2023.

WHAT THE RATE HIDES

Present, but sick

A low rate can also mean that people come in sick. In DAK's 2024 survey, 62.5% of employees had worked at least once in the past year when they should have reported sick, at the workplace or from home; in 2015, 67.5%.

REASONS GIVEN BY THOSE WHO WORKED SICK, 2024 (2025)



OUR READING

The most common reason is loyalty to colleagues. Where there is no cover, coming in sick is how people protect the team.

Source: DAK-Gesundheit; Susanne Hildebrandt, Terese Dehl & Hans-Dieter Nolting, IGES Institut, 2025

Shares of the 3,950–4,261 who had worked sick; several reasons could apply. A bonus for no sick days moved 1.6%. 92.2% of all respondents never stayed away without good reason. Burnout is in No. 29, mental health in No. 75.

TOOL OF THE ISSUE

The absence card

One card for reading the team's absence each month. The Shift Capacity tool takes an absence allowance when it works out the heads each shift needs, so the absence you expect is planned rather than absorbed.

01 What is counted working or calendar days; who is in the base; notes only, or every absence

02 How often, how long number of absences and average length, separately

03 Long cases apart over six weeks: who supports the return

04 Same month last year colds peak in winter; compare like with like, never one day

05 Worked sick ask the team, anonymously: who came in or logged on ill, and why

06 What we change cover, workload, the absence allowance in the plan

Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), nach der Arbeitszeitrechnung des IAB, 2026; Techniker Krankenkasse; Thomas Grobe & Sven Bessel, aQua-Institut, 2026; DAK-Gesundheit; Susanne Hildebrandt, Terese Dehl & Hans-Dieter Nolting, IGES Institut, 2025

The card is the editors' proposal, built on the definitions of Destatis, TK and DAK and on DAK's survey; it uses the team's figures, never a person's diagnosis. The essay linked below sets out the author's card for any KPI.

More in the essay — KPIs the team trusts

Open the tool: Shift Capacity — stivencatalyst.com/tools/shift-capacity/

SOURCES AND METHOD

Every figure has a source.

The figures in this issue come from the sources below. The year shows how recent each one is.

Indikatoren zur Qualität der Arbeit: Krankenstand

Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), nach der Arbeitszeitrechnung des IAB, 2026

https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Arbeit/Arbeitsmarkt/Indikatoren-Qualitaet-Arbeit/Dimension-2/krankenstand.html

Entgeltfortzahlungsgesetz (EntgFG), § 3 Anspruch auf Entgeltfortzahlung im Krankheitsfall und § 5 Anzeige- und Nachweispflichten

Bundesministerium der Justiz, gesetze-im-internet.de, 1994

https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/entgfg/

Gesundheitsreport 2026: Arbeitsunfähigkeiten

Techniker Krankenkasse; Thomas Grobe & Sven Bessel, aQua-Institut, 2026

https://www.tk.de/resource/blob/2214302/78df7e278b4eb9519cf89ef483ecb8a7/gesundheitsreport-au-2026-data.pdf

Gesundheitsreport 2025: Analyse der Arbeitsunfähigkeiten. Mythos Rekordkrankenstand. Generation Z in der Arbeitswelt

DAK-Gesundheit; Susanne Hildebrandt, Terese Dehl & Hans-Dieter Nolting, IGES Institut, 2025

https://caas.content.dak.de/caas/v1/media/142382/data/8f878876acd7ba6e3076622bcc006219/gesundheitsreport2025-ebook.pdf

EDITORIAL METHOD

Each figure was checked for its year, its publisher and what it measures, in the full text where it could be opened. A source read only in a summary, an abstract or excerpts is marked “via”. A figure not confirmed in what was read is marked so on its page, or left out. The editor's interpretation is marked “Our reading”.



MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.

Every issue, one management question, checked against the best research.

ALL ISSUES

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Edited by Stiven Janaqi, who answers for it; “the editors” in this publication means him. Its texts, translations, layout and the checking of figures against their sources are done in working sessions with Claude, an AI model by Anthropic.
stivencatalyst.com/how-this-is-made.html