# **Finnish Institute of** Occupational Health

**Background:** The patterns of sickness absence (SA), i.e., the clustering of differing lengths of episodes and total number of days absent, have not been examined. We examined these SA patterns and factors associated with the patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methods

- Survey data from employees of four Finnish cities in 2020 was linked with SA • Low SA (n=31 320, 79%) data in 2021 retrieved from employer registers.
- n=39 791 (78 % women).
- Clustering was performed with K-means model including number of SA days, short (1-9 days), and long (10-365 days) Conclusions SA episodes.
- Employee and work characteristics associated with SA patterns were analysed with multinomial regression.



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## Sickness absence patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic among **Finnish public sector employees**

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## Results

Four SA patterns were identified:

- Repeated short SA episodes (n=5149, 13%)
- Repeated long SA episodes (n= 2964, 7%)
- Very high SA, long episodes (n= 358, 1%)

- We identified four distinct patterns that characterized SA behaviors among employees.
- Individual characteristics, but also COVID-19 related factors were associated with the observed SA patterns.

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## Results

Compared to those with other SA patterns, employees with Low SA pattern were more likely to have no history of COVID-19 infections have worked remotely during the pandemic be men in higher occupational positions have a healthier body mass index

- younger, unmarried employees
- employees in temporary jobs
- current smokers
- those using passive commuting
- pandemic

### Repeated Long SA and Very high SA patterns included

- a higher proportion of older employees
- those who did not cycle to work

• be less likely to be former smokers or abstain from alcohol

Repeated Short SA pattern was more common among

individuals who had experienced team reorganization during the