

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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**RAVEN M ADAMS**  
Claimant

**APPEAL 17A-UI-03435-LJ-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**WAL-MART STORES INC**  
Employer

**OC: 03/05/17  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

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Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

The claimant filed an appeal from the March 22, 2017 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon a determination that claimant was discharged from employment for excessive, unexcused absenteeism. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on April 19, 2017. The claimant, Raven M. Adams, participated. The employer, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., participated through Bobby Michaud, Assistant Manager.

**ISSUE:**

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed part time, most recently as a cashier, from January 2016 until March 4, 2017, when she was discharged for absenteeism. Claimant's final absence occurred on February 28, 2017. Claimant called in that day and reported that she would not be at work because she was ill. Claimant testified that she called prior to her shift to make sure that she would not exceed her allotted attendance points if she called in sick that day. The employer has a no-fault attendance policy that treats all absences the same regardless of the reason.

**REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed.

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

2. Discharge for misconduct. If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

a. The individual shall be disqualified for benefits until the individual has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the individual's weekly benefit amount, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) provides:

(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due to properly reported illness cannot constitute work-connected misconduct since they are not volitional, even if the employer was fully within its rights to assess points or impose discipline up to or including discharge for the absence under its attendance policy. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7); *Cosper*, supra; *Gaborit v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 734 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). Medical documentation is not essential to a determination that an absence due to illness should be treated as excused. *Gaborit*, supra. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct **except for illness or other reasonable grounds** for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) (emphasis added); see *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190, n. 1 (Iowa 1984) holding "rule [2]4.32(7)...accurately states the law."

The requirements for a finding of misconduct based on absences are therefore twofold. First, the absences must be excessive. *Sallis v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins* at 192. Second, the absences must be unexcused. *Cosper* at 10. The requirement of "unexcused" can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for "reasonable grounds," *Higgins* at 191, or because it was not "properly reported," holding excused absences are those "with appropriate notice." *Cosper* at 10.

The term "absenteeism" also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as "tardiness." An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of

childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins, supra*. However, a good faith inability to obtain childcare for a sick infant may be excused. *McCourtney v. Imprimis Tech., Inc.*, 465 N.W.2d 721 (Minn. Ct. App. 1991). See, *Gimbel v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 489 N.W.2d 36 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992) where a claimant's late call to the employer was justified because the claimant, who was suffering from an asthma attack, was physically unable to call the employer until the condition sufficiently improved; and *Roberts v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 356 N.W.2d 218 (Iowa 1984) where unreported absences are not misconduct if the failure to report is caused by mental incapacity.

The employer has not established that claimant had excessive absences which would be considered unexcused for purposes of unemployment insurance eligibility. Because claimant's last absence was related to properly reported illness or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct. Since the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct, without such, the history of other incidents need not be examined. Accordingly, benefits are allowed.

**DECISION:**

The March 22, 2017 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided she is otherwise eligible. Any benefits claimed and withheld on this basis shall be paid.

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Elizabeth A. Johnson  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed