



ETC International College

Maternity, Paternity and Carer's Leave Policy

April 2026

Maternity leave - introduction

If you are a pregnant employee you are currently entitled to 26 weeks' ordinary maternity leave. You may then take an extra 26 weeks' additional maternity leave, giving you a year's leave in total. If you take a year off, you'll have taken your full statutory maternity leave.

You can take this regardless of how long you've been in your job, how many hours you work or how much you're paid. To claim this entitlement you must give your employer the correct notice.

Even if you don't decide to take all of the maternity leave you are entitled to, you will have to take two weeks of leave after your baby is born. (4 weeks compulsory leave for factory workers).

Key points

- Pregnant employees have the right to 52 weeks maternity leave.
- 39 weeks could be paid which may be statutory maternity pay, maternity allowance or contractual maternity pay (contractual pay may be more than statutory pay or could be paid for longer than 39 week - this will depend on the terms of employment).
- During maternity leave employee and employer can agree to have up to 10 keep in touch days.
- Paid reasonable time off for antenatal care.
- Employee has the right to return to original job or suitable alternative.

Maternity leave and pay

A pregnant employee has the right to both 26 weeks of ordinary maternity leave as well as 26 weeks of additional maternity leave. To qualify for maternity leave, an employee must tell their employer by the end of the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth:

- that she is pregnant
- the expected week of childbirth, by means of a medical certificate if requested
- the date she intends to start maternity leave. This can normally be any date which is no earlier than the beginning of the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth up to the birth. It is best to advise the employer as soon as possible.

Once notification has been given to the employer they must then write to the employee, within 28 days of her notification, setting out her return date. The employee must give 8 weeks' notice if she wishes to change the return date.

All pregnant employees are entitled to reasonable time off with pay for antenatal care made on the advice of a registered medical practitioner, which may include relaxation classes and parent-craft classes. Except for the first appointment, employees should show the employer, if requested, an appointment card or other documents showing that an appointment has been made.

Shared Parental Leave (from April 2015)

Under a new system of flexible parental leave, parents will be able to choose how they share care of their child during the first year after birth. Parents will remain entitled to take maternity or paternity leave. However, an eligible mother may now choose to reduce their maternity leave early and opt in to Shared Parental Leave.

Mothers will have to take at least the initial two weeks of leave following the birth as a recovery period (4 weeks for manual factory workers). Following that they can choose to end the maternity leave and the parents can opt to share the remaining leave as flexible parental leave.

Shared Parental Leave (ShPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) is available to eligible parents of babies born on or after 5th April 2015. Please read the ETC Shared Parental Leave and Pay Policy.

Statutory maternity pay

Statutory maternity pay (SMP) will be payable if the employee has been employed continuously for at least 26 weeks ending with the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth, and has an average weekly earnings at least equal to the lower earnings limit for National Insurance contributions. SMP is payable for 39 weeks; for the first six weeks it is paid at 90 percent of the average weekly earnings.

The following 33 weeks will be paid at the SMP rate or 90 per cent of the average weekly earnings whichever is the lower. The SMP rate from 1st April 2024 is £184.03 per week (from 6th April 2025 the rate is £187.18), the standard rate for SMP is reviewed every April.

SMP is paid in the same way as your wages (every 2 weeks). Tax and National Insurance will be deducted.

Holiday:

Before you take your leave we will discuss with you:

- How much holiday entitlement you will accrue before and during your planned maternity leave.
- If you are going to take your accrued holiday before or after maternity leave.
- If and how much you can carry over – this may depend on how far through the current holiday year you are when you return to work after maternity leave.

You can only take your holiday before or after your maternity leave; you cannot receive holiday pay whilst on maternity.

We must allow you to take your statutory holiday entitlement during the holiday year. We must allow you to carry it over to the next holiday year if you have been on maternity and not been able to use it if you have been on maternity for all or most of the holiday year.

Before taking maternity leave

To take maternity leave you must inform your employer no later than the end of the 15th week before the week the baby is due. If you aren't able to do this, for example because you didn't realise you were pregnant, tell them as soon as you can.

You should tell your Line Manager at ETC in writing:

- that you are pregnant
- when your baby is due
- when you want to begin your maternity leave

You can change the date you start your maternity leave later, as long as you give 28 days' notice.

Your maternity leave can begin any time from 11 weeks before the beginning of the week when your baby's due. However, the date may be brought forward if you take time off work because of your pregnancy within four weeks of the expected birth date. ETC may request that you start your leave from then.

You may also be asked for a MAT B1 form to confirm the details of your pregnancy and leave. Your doctor or midwife will give you one of these after you have reached 21 weeks of pregnancy, but not before. The MAT B1 is your maternity certificate, and gives your baby's due date.

Once this is sorted, you can expect your employer to write to you within 28 days to confirm the dates of your statutory maternity leave.

If you fall pregnant again while you are on maternity leave, you can take more leave for your next child.

During maternity leave

ETC may make contact with you (within reason), and you may want to contact us, while you are on maternity leave to discuss a range of issues. These include your plans for returning to work, and important developments at your workplace such as opportunities for promotion.

You can work for up to 10 days during your maternity leave, under your contract of employment, as long as both you and your employer agree on what work you'll be doing and how much you'll be paid for it. However, you cannot work during the two weeks immediately after your child is born, since this maternity leave is compulsory.

Returning to work

Unless you tell ETC otherwise, we will assume that you plan to take all 52 weeks of your statutory maternity leave. If you do take all 52 weeks, then you do not need to give notice that you are coming back.

If you want to return to work earlier than this, you will have to give at least eight weeks' notice. In this case, please tell your Line Manager at ETC that you:

- want to go back to work early
- want to change the date when you go back

If you decide you are not returning to work, you will need to give ETC the normal amount of notice. You will still be entitled to receive your full amount of maternity leave and pay.

All women have a right to return to work after maternity leave, no matter what size their employer's company is.

Qualifying for statutory maternity pay

Statutory maternity pay (SMP) is a weekly payment from your employer. Currently, you will only be able to claim this maternity pay if:

- You have been working for the same employer without a break for at least 26 weeks. You can measure these 26 weeks against the end of the 15th week before the week your baby is due.
- You are earning, before tax, an average of £123 a week (£125 from 6th April 2025), for 8 weeks before your qualifying week. This is called the lower earnings limit for National Insurance contributions. You have to earn more than this amount before you actually start paying National Insurance.

How much money can I claim?

For the first six weeks of your leave you will be paid at 90 per cent of your average gross weekly earnings. For the remaining 33 weeks you may be paid a smaller amount. You will get the lower of either the standard rate of £184.03 (£187.18 from 6th April 2025), or 90 per cent of your average gross weekly earnings.

The [Department for Work and Pensions](#) offers further information.

Your entitlements could differ to those of your colleagues or friends who work for other companies. You should also look in your contract of employment and see what it says about the company's maternity policy. If you have more than one job you may be able to get SMP from both employers.

How to claim SMP

You must provide ETC with evidence of when your baby is due: the maternity certificate MAT B1. The earliest that this certificate will be issued by your doctor or midwife is 20 weeks before the week in which your baby is due. This is around the 21st week of your pregnancy.

You'll also need to tell your employer when you want your maternity pay to start. You should do this by the 15th week before your baby is due. You can change your mind but you must still give your employer at least 28 days' notice of the new SMP start date.

What is maternity allowance?

This benefit is usually awarded to you if you've changed jobs during pregnancy, are self-employed or have been unemployed during pregnancy.

If for any reason ETC decides that you do not qualify for SMP, ETC will fill in and give you form SMP1, explaining the reason. You should be able to get maternity allowance by sending this form to your local Jobcentre Plus with your maternity allowance (MA1) claim form.

Download your MA1 form at the Directgov website, or call: 0800 055 6688. You will also need your MAT B1 form and evidence of your earnings.

Maternity Allowance is paid for a maximum of 39 weeks and you can start claiming 11 weeks before your baby is due. To qualify, they must have been employed or self-employed for 26 weeks out of the 66 weeks before the expected week of childbirth earning at least £30 a week over any 13-week period.

How much Maternity Allowance you are entitled to is based on how much you earn.

Do I have any automatic health protection during pregnancy?

Under UK health and safety legislation, employers must take reasonable measures to protect their employees. There is a special protection if you are pregnant, have given birth within the last six months, or if you are breastfeeding.

When you tell ETC about your pregnancy, your Line Manager should review their risk assessment for your specific work. The Line Manager should involve you in the process of identifying any changes that are necessary to protect you and your unborn baby.

Potential risks include:

- standing or sitting for long periods, causing mental or physical fatigue
- long working hours, including night work
- handling or lifting heavy loads
- exposure to toxic substances

If there is a risk, your employer must either take steps to remove it, or make arrangements so that you're not exposed to it. This could mean either remedying the risk or if this cannot be done, temporarily

changing your working conditions or offering you suitable alternative work.

If that is not possible, you are entitled to be suspended on full pay. You have this right no matter how long you've been working for your company.

Antenatal appointments

You are legally allowed to take reasonable paid time off to attend your antenatal appointments during working hours.

You will be asked to produce evidence that you are pregnant. Show your Line Manager your MAT B1 form, which you will get from your GP or midwife sometime after your 20th week of pregnancy. You should then be able to attend antenatal classes.

Your partner has no legal right for paid time off for these sessions. However, many employers allow their staff to take time off and make up the hours later.

You have this right no matter how long you've been working for your company.

Can I take a break if I feel exhausted?

Employers must legally provide somewhere for you to rest when you are pregnant or breastfeeding. If you need it, this should also include somewhere to lie down.

If you want to express milk for your baby, you may want to ask ETC for a private, clean space to do so – a request that ETC would normally grant.

Is statutory paternity leave and pay available?

When your partner is having a baby, you may be entitled to:

- two weeks statutory paternity leave and pay in either 2x one-week or 1x two-week period within 52 weeks of birth.
- Up to 26 weeks' paid Additional Parental Leave, if the child was due on or before 5th April 2018
- Shared Parental Leave, if your child was due on or after 5th April 2018. Please read the ETC Shared Parental Leave and Pay Policy.
- You must tell your employer of your entitlement and intention to take leave by the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth (EWC) (or as soon as reasonably practical) but you do not have to give notice of the dates you intend to take leave on until at least 28 days before that period of leave is due to start.

To be eligible for Paternity Pay you must:

- be employed by your employer up to the date of birth
- earn an average of at least £123 a week (£125 from 6th April 2025), (before tax)
- give the correct notice (15 weeks' notice. If you wish to change the start date you must give 28 days' notice. You do not have to give a precise date when you want to take leave).
- have been continuously employed by your employer for at least 26 weeks up to the end of any day in the 'qualifying week'
- The 'qualifying week' is the 15th week before the baby is due. This is different if you adopt.

The Directgov paternity rights web page offers further advice.

Parental leave is available to natural and adoptive parents, as well as husbands, partners and civil partners

who expect to take responsibility for the child.

The statutory weekly rate of Paternity Pay and Additional Paternity Pay is £184.03 (£187.18 from 6th April 2025), or 90 percent of your average weekly earnings (whichever is lower).

Any money you get is paid in the same way as your wages, e.g. every two weeks. Tax and National Insurance will be deducted.

You are entitled to unpaid leave to accompany your partner or surrogate mother to two antenatal appointments. If you are adopting a child, you can get unpaid time off to attend two adoption appointments after you have been matched with a child.

Do I have to use my annual leave if my childcare arrangements break down?

You should be allowed a reasonable amount of time off for dependents by your employer. These short periods of leave are negotiable with your employer. You may want to take this time off if your childcare arrangements break down, or if your child falls ill.

The leave is not necessarily paid. You'll have to discuss this with your employer, and check your contract for details. There are extended leave periods for parents of children with disabilities.

Other benefits

You may be entitled to other benefits, including:

Free prescriptions

You'll be able to claim free prescriptions from pregnancy until your baby is a year old. You'll need a valid maternity exemption certificate or card (MatEx), which you can apply for through your midwife, GP or health visitor.

Free dental treatment

While you are pregnant, and until your baby is 1 year old, you will be entitled to free dental treatment. You will need to show your dentist your MAT B1 and MatEx forms.

Child Benefit

All parents can currently claim this until their children are 19 or have left full-time education.

Tax Credits

We would advise you to check these via the Directgov website or the ACAS website.

Protection from Redundancy

Employees on maternity leave, adoption leave and shared parental leave must be given priority over other employees in being offered any suitable alternative employment available when their existing role is being made redundant.

The current protections are extended as follows:

- From the point the employer is made aware of the pregnancy up to 18 months after the birth of the child.
- For employees on adoption leave, the protection is extended to 18 months from the date of

- placement.
- For employees taking less than 6 weeks shared parental leave, they are protected during their period of leave. Employees taking more than 6 continuous weeks of shared parental leave are protected for 18 months from the birth of the child.

These rules do not prevent an employee being selected for redundancy, but gives them priority where their role is redundant and suitable alternative roles are available.

Neonatal Leave (by early 2025)

An employee has the right to take up to 12 weeks leave where a child who is 28 days old or younger is admitted to hospital for care for a continuous period of seven days or more.

The employee has a right to statutory neonatal pay where the employee meets service and minimum earnings criteria.

Carer's Leave (6.4.24)

All employees may take up to one week of unpaid Carer's Leave per 12 months to provide or arrange care for a dependent with a long-term care need.

The leave can be taken in single or half days with a notice requirement of three days and or double the length of leave requested, whichever is the longer.

The leave cannot be refused but it can be postponed where it is reasonably believed that the operations of the business would be unduly disrupted if the leave were taken at that time. However, the leave would have to be given within one month (on a date agreed after consulting with the employee), and a counter-notice served setting out the reason for the postponement and the new date the leave can be taken.

Employees can't be asked to provide proof of why the leave is required.

Paternity leave and ordinary parental leave (6.4.26)

Paternity leave and ordinary parental leave (or unpaid parental leave) will become a 'day one right' for employees from 6 April 2026. From 18 February 2026, newly eligible employees can give notice that they intend to take leave.

These things will change on 6 April 2026:

- paternity leave will become a 'day one right', allowing someone to give notice of leave from the first day of employment – currently someone must have worked for their employer for 26 weeks
- ordinary parental leave, or unpaid parental leave, will also become a day one right – currently someone must have worked for their employer for 1 year to be eligible
- the restriction on taking paternity leave after shared parental leave will be removed
- eligible fathers and partners will be able to take up to 52 weeks of unpaid bereaved partner's paternity leave if the mother or primary adopter dies – they must take this leave within 52 weeks of the child's birth (including surrogacy), adoption placement, or entry to Great Britain for overseas adoptions

Note: bereaved partner's paternity leave is separate legislation.

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Next update due: April 2027