

Paternity and parental leave

When you take time off because your partner's having a baby, adopting a child¹, or having a baby through surrogacy, you may be eligible for paternity leave, paternity pay, and/or shared parental leave and pay. These are statutory rights, which means they are mandatory and enforceable by law.

Your other employment rights (which include the right to pay, holidays, and return to a job after taking leave) are protected whilst on paternity leave – but note that unlike women who are pregnant or on maternity leave, you do not have additional protection against redundancy.

The Government is undertaking a review of the parental leave system². Until that review is completed, this factsheet summarises the rules as they currently stand.

What is paternity leave?

Statutory paternity leave is time you can take off work to spend with your newborn baby. If you are eligible, you can take one or two weeks' leave. If you choose to take two weeks and live in England, Scotland or Wales, you can take these as two separate week-long blocks, or in one 2-week block; in Northern Ireland you must take the two weeks together.

The amount of leave you are entitled to does not change if you have a multiple birth (i.e. more than one baby).

You do not need to give a precise date for when you will take the leave – you can give a general time, such as 'the day of the birth' – but your leave cannot start before the birth and must end within 52 weeks of the birth. Below we explain how and when to apply to take paternity leave.



We are campaigning for a better statutory paternity package for fathers. Find out more and share your story [here](#).

¹ If you are adopting as a couple, one of you can take [adoption leave](#) (which is equivalent to maternity leave, but can be taken by a parent of either/any sex/ gender) and the other can take paternity leave. If you are a solo adopting father, you can take adoption leave.

² The review was [announced](#) in July 2025 and estimated to run for 18 months.

What is paternity pay?

Statutory paternity pay is the amount of money you are paid, if you are eligible, whilst on paternity leave. From 6 April 2026 the rate of paternity pay is £194.32 per week (increasing from £187.18 per week in 2025-26) OR 90% of your average weekly earnings – whichever is lower.

This amount will be paid in the same way as your usual wages, with tax and national insurance deducted.

You may get more money if your employer has an 'enhanced' paternity offer; they cannot give you less than the statutory amount.

Am I eligible for paternity leave and pay?

To be eligible for **statutory paternity leave and pay**, you must be taking time off to look after the baby, and be one of the following:

- Biological father of the baby
- Partner of the mother (or of the parent taking adoption leave) – this includes same-sex partners
- Intended parent (if having a baby through surrogacy).

To qualify for **statutory paternity leave** you must be an employee. From **6 April 2026**³, so as long as you meet the criteria above, you can take paternity leave as a Day 1 right (i.e. from your first day in a job). You are also able to take paternity leave after Shared Parental Leave.

To qualify for **statutory paternity pay** you must have been continuously employed by your employer for at least 26 weeks up to the 'qualifying week' (15th week before the baby is due)⁴. You must also be employed by your employer up to the date of the birth, and earn at least £129/week (before tax)⁵. If you don't meet these criteria but take paternity leave (which is now, as explained above, a Day 1 right), it will be **unpaid**.

³ From **18 February 2026**, the day-one right applies **immediately** if the baby's mother or adopter has died; parents in this situation can also take paternity leave after shared parental leave. For everyone else, the February changes allow employees to start giving their employer the required notices and evidence ahead of the full April rollout, so that leave can be arranged smoothly.

⁴ Or up to the 'matching week' if adopting: the week you're matched with the child, or the date the child enters the UK

⁵ This is the Lower Earnings Limit for National Insurance. It was £125 for 2025/26.

For each period of paternity leave you take, you must give your employer at least 28 days' notice of your proposed leave dates.

You can use this [tool](#) to check whether you can get statutory paternity leave and/or pay, and when you need to claim by.

If you're not eligible, your employer must tell you within 28 days of your claim (see below) if you do not qualify and why.

How can I claim paternity leave and pay?

You need to fill in an [online form](#) and send it to your employer at least 15 weeks before the baby is due. If your employer has their own form, use that instead.

You do not need to give proof of the pregnancy or birth.

The rules and forms are different if you [adopt or use surrogacy](#).

What is shared parental leave and pay?

Shared parental leave (SPL) is time you can take off work to spend with your newborn baby (or newly adopted child), if you and your partner are eligible, and she wants to share her leave with you. Shared parental pay (ShPP) is the amount of money you are paid whilst on SPL.

Your partner can share up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of pay with you, taken within the first year after your child is born (or placed with your family, if adopting).

ShPP is paid at £194.32 per week or 90% of your average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

You can take SPL in up to three blocks separated by periods of work or take it all in one go. You can choose to be off work at the same time as your partner or stagger the leave and pay.

You and your partner can each work up to 20 days while you're taking SPL (shared parental leave in touch days, or SPLIT) – these are optional, both you and your employers must agree to them.

Unlike paternity leave, SPL does bring with it the additional redundancy protections that apply to maternity leave.

Currently, you must take paternity leave *before* taking shared parental leave otherwise you will lose your right to take any paternity leave remaining available to you. The Employment Rights Bill will remove this restriction.

Am I eligible for shared parental leave and pay?

You and your partner need to:

- Share responsibility for the child at birth. You're not eligible if you started sharing responsibility for the child after they were born
- Meet work and pay [criteria](#) – depending on which parent wants to use the leave and pay
- Give your employer at least eight weeks' written notice

Your partner needs to give up some of her maternity leave and pay:

- She must take less than 52 weeks of maternity leave, using up to 50 weeks as SPL
- She must take less than 39 weeks of maternity pay (or Maternity Allowance), using up to 37 weeks as ShPP

Eligibility criteria are different if you're [adoptive parents or parents using a surrogate](#).

You can use this [tool](#) to check whether you can get SPL and ShPP, and how much leave and pay you're entitled to.

How can I claim shared parental leave and pay?

You need to fill in these [forms](#) and send them to your employer, to:

- Give them notice that you plan to take SPL and ShPP
- Give them notice of when the mother is going to end her maternity leave and stop her maternity pay
- Book your leave dates

If your employer has their own forms, use those instead.

You can change your mind about how much SPL or ShPP you want to take and when, but you must give at least eight weeks' notice of any changes.

You can start SPL once:

- Your baby has been born (or your child placed with your family for adoption)
- The mother has returned to work, ending her maternity leave
 - *A mother cannot return to work before the end of the compulsory two weeks' of maternity leave
- You can start SPL whilst the mother is still on maternity leave so long as she's given her employer binding notice of the date when she plans to end her leave

You can start ShPP once:

- Your baby has been born (or your child placed with your family for adoption)
- The mother has given her employer notice of the date she plans to end any maternity pay
 - *If she gets Maternity Allowance, she must give notice to Jobcentre Plus instead
 - *She cannot restart maternity pay or Maternity Allowance once it's ended

What about 'enhanced' leave and pay?

Some employers offer 'enhanced' leave and pay to parents who work for them. Such packages, which go above and beyond the statutory requirements, vary enormously.

In rare cases, they may offer several months or even up to a year of leave, on a significant proportion of your usual pay.

Many employers enhance maternity leave more generously than they do paternity leave.

It's worth asking your employer if they offer enhanced leave and pay – and including this in your list of questions for prospective employers if you're thinking about moving job.

There are now various databases compiling different employers' enhanced leave and pay packages. These can help you get a sense of what the most generous organisations are now offering. Examples are the [Inspiring Dads](#), [Nugget Savings](#) and [Parenting Out Loud](#) databases.

What about antenatal appointments?

You can take **unpaid leave** (of up to 6.5 hrs each time) to accompany your partner (or the surrogate mother) to two antenatal appointments.

If you're a permanent employee, you can apply for this leave without needing to have worked for your employer for a minimum period; if you're an agency worker you'll need to have been doing the job for 12 weeks before you qualify.

If you're adopting and taking paternity leave, you can take unpaid leave to attend two adoption appointments after you've been matched with a child. Parents taking adoption leave can take paid leave for five adoption appointments.

What if we lose our baby?

You are still eligible for paternity leave and/or pay if your baby was [stillborn](#) from 24 weeks of pregnancy or was born alive at any point during the pregnancy. You may also be eligible for [parental bereavement leave and pay](#).

If you lose your baby prior to 24 weeks of pregnancy, you can request a [baby loss certificate](#) from the Government recognising your grief (free, optional).

You can find helpful resources and support for dads and partners who have lost a baby in our [Men and Baby Loss](#) factsheet.

What about other types of leave?

If you are an employee, you may be able to take a short amount of [unpaid parental leave](#); [time off for dependants](#); and/or annual leave

(many fathers do this because it is paid at full pay, rather than at the lower statutory rate).

This factsheet was updated on 16 February 2026.