

# Guidance Document on Leave Entitlements for NCHDs Who Are Parents

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Date of publication:  
August 2024

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Some sections of this booklet were adapted from the 'Supporting doctors as parents' booklet prepared in 2020 by Dr Doireann Pereira (Eves), Dr Siobhan Quirke, and Dr Christine Kelly, and they have kindly given us permission to reproduce some of this information here.

The authors of this current document wished to focus primarily on entitlements to leave and how these may be taken and organised, however we drew some additional information from the 'Supporting doctors as parents' booklet and would like to sincerely thank those who prepared it for their invaluable contribution.

### **Note**

This booklet was prepared to assist doctors who are new parents in planning their leave and to inform them of their entitlements. It is not intended to be a comprehensive document, merely some assistance. All entitlements should be checked directly with your employer well in advance. Changes to government policy on duration of leave entitlements etc. may be announced in the future and hence may differ from those outlined below.

The individual employee is responsible for checking all of their entitlements carefully. The authors of this document and the RCPI cannot be held accountable for how any individual decides to take their leave, the below is advice only, and any inaccuracies are the responsibility of the individual employee to check.

# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

**The Physician Health and Wellbeing Committee is a group of RCPI trainees who are committed to improving the training conditions and wellbeing of NCHDs.**

This document aims to provide information and to improve the training experience of doctors who are balancing postgraduate RCPI medical training with parenthood.

We appreciate that there are a number of complex issues that arise in relation to this topic, and that there is much beyond the scope of this document. Our objective is to provide clear and up-to-date information that will allow you to know your rights regarding taking a leave of absence and returning to work. We also want to ensure that you have all the information required to access all support and funding that you are entitled to.

Please note that this document is for all parents, however depending on circumstances some sections will be relevant only to the pregnant parent and some subgroups of parents.

## SECTION 2: WELLBEING IN PREGNANCY

**\*This section is applicable to the pregnant parent primarily, but some advice may be relevant to their partners and others.**

Pregnancy can be an exciting time but can also be a tiring, worrying, and busy time for some. There is an abundance of evidence-based resources about looking after yourself and your baby during pregnancy. For further information see the HSE pregnancy and birth website:

<https://www2.hse.ie/pregnancy-birth/keeping-well/>

In addition, many maternity units also have extensive online and printed resources. Your GP, midwife, and obstetric team can also provide information.

Practical things you may need to arrange include appointments, blood tests, antenatal education and pregnancy vaccinations (including for Pertussis, Influenza, and Covid). More information on vaccinations before, during, and after pregnancy is available on the National Immunisations Office (NIO) website:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/pregvaccs/>

NCHDs are entitled to paid leave for all antenatal appointments, regardless of the frequency, timing, or distance from the employing hospital.

Should your post involve activities that may be dangerous or unsafe during pregnancy, speak to Occupational Health and your line manager regarding this as early in your pregnancy as possible.

# SECTION 3: PLANNING FOR MATERNITY AND OTHER LEAVE

## Antenatal appointments and classes

You are entitled to paid time off for antenatal appointments and attendance at antenatal classes. Usually these must be accommodated if you give written notice at least two weeks prior, but check with your team or local HR what the local requirements are. If notice is not given for reasons outside of your control, you can keep this entitlement as long as you inform your employer in writing within one week of the antenatal appointment. For antenatal classes you are entitled to one set of antenatal classes over all your pregnancies. As an expectant father you are entitled to time off to attend one antenatal class prior to the birth.

Further information on these entitlements is available on the Citizens Information webpages.

## Adoptive appointments and classes

You are entitled to paid time off to attend preparation classes and pre-adoption meetings with social workers.

## Planning your leave

- i. This is laid out in the order in which you need to take your leave if you are taking all of the following:
- ii. ***Maternity leave – statutory paid maternity leave***

**26 weeks paid leave.** You must start this at the latest the Monday before you're due i.e. if you are due on a Wednesday, you only need to start 9 days before the due date, if due on a Sunday you need to take a full two weeks before the due date. You must fill out the form below or else you won't get paid. Usually this gets paid directly to you (you will need to have selected this option on the social welfare form and input your bank details), your employer then tops you up to your full pay in scheduled payments as your salary is normally paid.

Some advice: Check your payslips and ensure your employer is deducting your maternity benefit from your salary (that is if you are getting it paid directly into your bank account rather than it going to your employer), otherwise your employer will request the total sum back from you at the end of your leave as a large lump sum which can be a nasty surprise!

### **Coming to the end of a contract?**

If the NCHD is in a standalone post or finishing a training scheme, the maternity leave must start before the contract ends). For example if a baby is due in September but your contract ends in July, to get the benefit of statutory paid maternity leave you would need to start your maternity leave **before** the end date of your contract in July.

Additionally, if the contract/training scheme ends while the NCHD is on maternity/adoptive leave, the employer is still responsible for paying the full maternity leave or adoptive leave.

- iii. ***Additional maternity leave- statutory unpaid maternity leave***

**16 weeks unpaid leave.** If taking this leave, it must be taken immediately after the paid maternity leave. This can be applied for at the same time as the paid maternity leave, however, you are not obliged to tell your employer until 4 weeks before you take it. Your scheme will probably want to know further in advance however, to work out placements etc.

**iv. Adoptive leave**

**24 weeks paid leave.** This can be taken by a qualifying adopter i.e. the adopter, in the case of a parent adopting on their own; or the nominated parent in the case of an adopting couple. The adopting couple can choose who takes the leave. The parent who does not take the leave is entitled to paternity leave. The 24 weeks starts from the date the child is placed with you.

**v. Additional adoptive leave**

**16 weeks unpaid leave.** If taking this leave, it must be taken immediately after the paid maternity leave. This can be applied for at the same time as the paid adoptive leave, however, you are not obliged to tell your employer until 4 weeks before you take it. Your scheme will probably want to know further in advance however, to work out placements etc.

**vi. Accrued annual leave and bank holidays**

Calculate all the annual leave and bank holidays that occurred during your maternity leave, both paid and unpaid. For the paid maternity leave this comes to 17 days (which is the amount of leave you are entitled to during a 6 month period – 12 days annual leave and 5 bank holidays). For the annual leave you are entitled to during your unpaid leave you can calculate this as the amount of annual leave you are entitled to during 6 months, divided by 26 and multiplied by 16. Some advice: always get someone to check your calculations to make sure you haven't made any mistakes. This leave is to be taken directly after your unpaid maternity leave (should you choose to take it) or after your paid statutory maternity leave if you are not taking the unpaid leave.

**vii. Paternity leave**

**This is 2 weeks paid leave that fathers are entitled to** take any time within the first six months following the birth or adoption placement. You must apply for this 4 weeks in advance at least and apply for Paternity Benefit from the Department of Social Protection in order to receive payment. Payment is a social welfare payment that may be topped up by an employer but for most NCHDs this will not be topped up.

**viii. Parents' leave**

**This is nine weeks of paid leave that, if taking, must be taken before your child's second birthday** (increased from seven to nine weeks in August 2024). It is available to both parents. You can claim Parent's benefit during this time, and this must be applied for through the Department of Social Protection. Employers have the option to top this up however for most NCHDs this is **not** topped up by your employer. How you take it is up to you, some take it as a block at the end of the above leave, others save it for when they are back at work. It must be taken in blocks of at least a week i.e. you can't take it as single days.

Some NCHDs have elected to use annual leave to take a day off a week (so that you are only working four day weeks) and saved parents' leave for holidays, where the employer has allowed.

**Timeline for taking time off work after baby's arrival:**

- 1) **First take paid statutory maternity leave (26 weeks)** commencing 2 weeks before baby's arrival (or adoptive leave on placement of the child). This runs then until baby is approximately 24 weeks old (depending on dates and timing as detailed above).
- 2) Next take **16 weeks of unpaid statutory maternity/adoptive leave** (or part thereof) **immediately following the paid leave** (if choose to do so).
- 3) Next take your **accrued annual leave/bank holidays immediately after your statutory leave.** This will be immediately after your paid maternity leave if you are not taking the unpaid statutory leave, and after your unpaid maternity leave if you are taking this.

- 4) **Finally**, any other type of leave, if taking before your return to work, can be taken following the three steps above, whether this is parents' leave (now 9 weeks), parental leave, or any other form of special unpaid leave.

**Additional Notes:**

Links to the forms required for each of these types of leave are available in section four below.

You can obtain a maximum of three months' credit for approved leave of absence during HST. If you take more than three months' leave during HST, your period of clinical training will be extended accordingly. In BST your training end date will be pushed out accordingly.

For trainees, policies on extended leave and return to work etc. are available on the HST and BST 'policies and procedures' sections of the RCPI website.

# SECTION 4: RETURNING TO WORK

## Entitlements for parents when back at work

### i. Parent's leave

See section three above- can be taken before returning to work or after, prior to your child's second birthday.

### ii. Parental leave

This entitles you to **26 weeks of unpaid leave per child**, up to the child's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. This is applied for by submitting the parental leave form below, as well as the child's birth certificate. When you are taking the leave, you must input it into NiSRP (HR and Payroll Self-Service) [This may differ depending on your training site- check with local Human Resources]. This is leave you are entitled to, so if you apply for it and it is rejected, they usually have to agree to it if you apply again. You can take this leave in blocks, or days, or even hours at a time. Some people use it to shorten their working week or day or over school holidays.

For those on training schemes you will need to fill out another leave of absence form for your training scheme, and the end date of your training will be pushed out accordingly.

### iii. Shorter working year

This is a public sector scheme whereby you can work less weeks (**unpaid**) in a given year with the pay recalculated and spread out over the year, or just unpaid for that period of time. Usually you need to apply before October of the previous year if you want to have your salary spread out, but in special circumstances you can apply up to 8 weeks before. In this case, however, no special pay arrangements can be made, it will be an unpaid period.

You will need to fill out another leave of absence form for your training scheme, and the end date of your training will be pushed out accordingly.

### iv. Breastfeeding leave

You are entitled to **one paid hour** of breastfeeding leave a day when you return to work until your child turns two years old. This can be in 20 or 30 minute blocks throughout the day, and a suitable space must be provided. If this is not possible, you can take it at the beginning and/or at the end of the day.

For more information see: <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/leave/breastfeeding-breaks/>

### v. Waiting period before going back on call

You are entitled to 4 to 6 weeks of a delay in returning to the call rota, when you are returning to work. This is to allow you the opportunity to become comfortable in the work environment following an extended leave, before returning to on-call duties. If for whatever reason you need to delay your return to the call rota for longer, this will need to be discussed with your training body. Please be aware of the on-call commitment for your speciality.

Further information on these entitlements can be found on the RCPI website.



#### vi. Other types of leave

In exceptional circumstances you may need to avail of other types of unpaid leave such as Force Majeure (e.g. in family emergencies), unpaid leave for when a child or relative is unwell (entitled to 5 days a year), or Special Unpaid Leave. NCHDs have availed of these types of leave in the past, particularly Special Unpaid Leave, if they have had to extend their time off after having a baby for issues such as access to childcare. Further information on all statutory entitlements and leave can be found on the Citizen's Information website, and all HSE leave entitlements and forms can be found here: <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-and-services/hr-forms/>

### Part-time working

#### i. Flexible hours contract

If you are reluctant to use up your parental leave to work a shorter week (as you do run through it quickly that way), you can apply to work reduced hours using a flexible contract. You will need to fill out the form as detailed below, as well as a leave of absence form from your scheme, and your end date will be pushed out accordingly. As part of your application you will need to outline your reasons for applying. If you apply and cannot accept, or are declined, you can re-apply in any subsequent year. The maximum length of time you can be on a flexible training schedule is two years, except in exceptional circumstances, but you do need to re-apply following your first year. For more information see <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/leadership-education-development/met/ed/flex/>

Don't be afraid to approach your training scheme directly to discuss flexible working or reduced days, as they might be amenable to coming to an arrangement without you having to go through the National Flexible Training Scheme. You can speak to your training coordinator, HR or NSD. From July 2025 RCPI will have a process for applying to work less than full time which will open in the Autumn of each year for applications for the next July.

### Training Support Scheme (TSS) and Clinical Course and Examination refund Scheme (CCERS)

These are available during maternity leave

# SECTION 5: IMPORTANT FORMS

All HSE HR forms are available here: <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-and-services/hr-forms/>.

Please note that some of these links could expire or be moved, so double check the form is the correct one, and refer back to the main HSE forms webpage (above) if a link is not working.

Type of leave - in alphabetical order	Forms	Timing
Adoptive benefit	<p>Social Welfare Services AB1 Form: Application Form for Adoptive Benefit</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/form/ce846b-adoptive-benefit-ab1/">https://www.gov.ie/en/form/ce846b-adoptive-benefit-ab1/</a></p> <p>You will need your employer to fill out part 4 and will also need to provide a certificate of placement.</p>	Minimum 6 weeks
Adoptive leave	<p>HSE HR108a Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/HR_108a_adoptive_leave_application_form.pdf">https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/HR_108a_adoptive_leave_application_form.pdf</a></p>	Minimum 4 weeks
Breastfeeding breaks	<p>HSE HR117 Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="hr117-breastfeeding-breaks-application-form.doc">hr117-breastfeeding-breaks-application-form.doc (live.com)</a></p>	Minimum 4 weeks
Flexible Working	<p>HSE HR111 Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-111-application-for-flexible-working.pdf">https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-111-application-for-flexible-working.pdf</a></p>	Usually late Autumn before the following July
Leave of Absence (LOA) from training Form (RCPI)	<p>RCPI Leave of Absence Form</p> <p>Available here for BST:  <a href="https://www.rcpi.ie/Learn-and-Develop/Training-Programmes/Basic-Specialist-Training/BST-Policies-Procedures-and-Important-Documents">https://www.rcpi.ie/Learn-and-Develop/Training-Programmes/Basic-Specialist-Training/BST-Policies-Procedures-and-Important-Documents</a></p> <p>Available here for HST:  <a href="https://www.rcpi.ie/Learn-and-Develop/Training-Programmes/Higher-Specialist-Training/HST-Policies-Procedures-and-Important-Documents">https://www.rcpi.ie/Learn-and-Develop/Training-Programmes/Higher-Specialist-Training/HST-Policies-Procedures-and-Important-Documents</a></p>	Depends on the type of LOA- discuss with RCPI/your NSD

Maternity Benefit	<p>This can be applied for online via MyWelfare.ie (you will need a verified MyGovID) or using the below form: Social Welfare Services MB1 Form: Application Form for Maternity Benefit</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/10311/db803e83c4364702b53b5acb663461bc.pdf#page=null">https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/10311/db803e83c4364702b53b5acb663461bc.pdf#page=null</a></p> <p>You will also need your employer to fill out the below form (which is also appended to the main maternity benefit form above):</p> <p>Social Welfare Services MB2 Form: Employer Certificate for Maternity Benefit</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/10309/8753cb545c3a4e4890dda6f3ff69e310.pdf#page=null">https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/10309/8753cb545c3a4e4890dda6f3ff69e310.pdf#page=null</a></p>	Minimum 6 weeks
Maternity Leave and Additional Unpaid Maternity Leave	<p>HSE HR108i Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-108-i-maternity-or-additional-maternity-leave-application-form.pdf">https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-108-i-maternity-or-additional-maternity-leave-application-form.pdf</a></p> <p>This needs to be signed, stamped and dated by your GP or obstetrician confirming your expected date of delivery.</p>	Minimum 4 weeks
Parental Leave	<p>HSE HR108j Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-108-j-parental-leave-application-form.pdf">https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-108-j-parental-leave-application-form.pdf</a></p>	Minimum 4 weeks

Parents' Leave	<p>HSE HR108t Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-108-t-employee-application-form-for-parents-leave.pdf">https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-108-t-employee-application-form-for-parents-leave.pdf</a></p>	Minimum 4 weeks
Parent's Benefit	<p>Apply through MyGov.ie (verified account required) or request a paper form from: parentsben@welfare.ie</p> <p>Website:</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b321b1-parents-benefit/">https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b321b1-parents-benefit/</a></p>	Minimum 4 weeks
Paternity Leave	<p>HSE HR108 (k1) Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/Paternity%20leave%20application%20form.pdf">https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/Paternity leave application form.pdf</a></p>	Minimum 4 weeks
Paternity Benefit	<p>Apply using MyGov.ie (verified account required) or request a paper form from: paternityben@welfare.ie.</p> <p>Website:</p> <p><a href="https://services.mywelfare.ie/en/topics/parents-children-family/paternity-benefit/">https://services.mywelfare.ie/en/topics/parents-children-family/paternity-benefit/</a></p>	Minimum 4 weeks
Shorter Working Year	<p>HSE HR115 Form</p> <p>Available here:</p> <p><a href="https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-115-shorter-working-year-scheme-application.pdf">https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/hr-115-shorter-working-year-scheme-application.pdf</a></p>	Date as advised in broadcast each year

## SECTION 6: IMPORTANT CHILDCARE INFORMATION

As you may be aware childcare in Ireland can be very difficult to source at present. It is advisable to begin trying to have childcare arrangements in place from reasonably early on in your pregnancy/ several months before your baby's arrival, particularly given the transient nature of our placements.

The good news is that childcare is becoming somewhat more affordable and more information on the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) which provides partial funding for certain childcare settings, is available on their website and on the Citizen's Information website.

Please be aware that you need a verified MyGov.ie account to access this funding and the parent/guardian applies for this in advance of taking up the childcare place (i.e. the childcare setting does not apply for this funding for you).

## SECTION 7: POSTNATAL SUPPORTS

RCPI runs in person Medical Parents events which offers the opportunity to meet colleagues from other specialities in an informal setting.

In the community there are usually support groups/coffee mornings and classes that are open to all parents. For those who are in a position to and choose to breastfeed, breastfeeding support groups are often available at a community level. Your public health nurse will give you the information, should you be interested, when they call out to visit you and your new baby following the birth.

The time after your baby's arrival is a very exciting time, however it can also be exhausting and challenging for many parents. Should you have any concerns regarding your or your partner's mental health it is important to seek help, speak to your GP, your mental health nurse or the mental health services connected with your maternity hospital (often they will provide support throughout pregnancy and up to a year afterwards).

These are just some suggestions, many more services are available nationwide.

**We wish you the best of luck in the exciting times ahead!**