

Neonatal care leave and pay

What the law says

A baby might get neonatal care if they:

- are born early
- are ill or injured when they are born
- have a low birth weight

Neonatal care leave allows parents to have additional time off to be with a baby who is receiving neonatal care. It can be used when the baby is no longer receiving neonatal care, for example, at the end of maternity leave.

The law is the Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act 2023. It came into effect on 6 April 2025.

The right to take neonatal care leave applies from the first day of work. The baby must be admitted to neonatal care in the first 28 days after birth. Eligible parents can take neonatal care leave once their child has been in neonatal care for at least 7 consecutive days.

Parents might be eligible for 1 week of leave for each week spent in neonatal care. They could take a maximum of 12 weeks of leave. This includes fathers and partners of birth parents.

What neonatal care includes

Neonatal care could include:

- medical care received in a hospital
- palliative or end-of-life care
- care or monitoring under the direction of a consultant but away from the hospital

Neonatal care might not take place in a neonatal unit. If a baby under 28 days starts receiving neonatal care, parents will be eligible to take neonatal care leave.

Neonatal care pay

To be eligible for neonatal care pay, parents must have 26 weeks of continuous service.

Eligible employees are entitled to whichever is lower:

- £187.18 a week (£194.32 from 6 April 2026)
- 90% of their average weekly earnings

[Find out more about neonatal care pay](#)

How much leave parents can take

The baby must be in care for at least 7 consecutive days before parents can take neonatal care leave. Parents will be able to take a minimum of 1 week, and a maximum of 12 weeks' leave. This will depend on how long their baby is getting neonatal care.

Parents will get 1 week of leave for each week the baby is in care, up to a maximum of 12 weeks.

For example, if the baby is in neonatal care for 3 weeks, parents can take 3 weeks neonatal care leave. If a baby is in neonatal care for 8 weeks, the parents can take 8 weeks neonatal care leave.

Example of calculating neonatal care leave entitlement

Im's baby is born on 7 April and needs neonatal care straight away. Their baby is in neonatal care until 22 April.

The 7 consecutive days starts on 8 April and ends on 15 April. The baby has been in neonatal care 2 complete weeks including the first qualifying days. Im has accrued 2 weeks of neonatal care leave in total.

If parents have not already booked leave

Employees can start their neonatal care leave only after the first 7 days of neonatal care have finished.

Employees might need to use another type of leave for those first 7 days if they are not already on planned leave. For example, time off for dependants.

For example, Sam has booked 2 weeks of paternity leave at the end of May. Sam's baby was born early and taken into neonatal care on 14 April. The baby is in care until 2 May. Sam cannot take neonatal care leave until 22 April. Sam's neonatal care leave will last until 6 May. Sam takes the first 7 days as [time off for dependants](#).

[Find out more about how much leave parents can take in the employers' technical guide on GOV.UK](#)

When parents can take leave

Neonatal care leave is in addition to other types of time off such as statutory:

- maternity leave
- paternity leave
- adoption leave
- shared parental leave
- parental bereavement leave

Parents must take leave before the end of 68 weeks from the date of birth. Neonatal care leave can be added to the end of statutory parental leave that has already been booked. It can also be used before other statutory parental leave.

Employees cannot take 2 types of leave at the same time.

For example, an employee has requested 2 weeks of paternity leave when their child is born. Their child is taken into neonatal care immediately. The employee can still take neonatal care leave, but it will be added to the end of the paternity leave.

2 tiers of leave

Leave can be taken in 2 tiers. These are split by when leave is taken to support the child in neonatal care:

- leave when the child is still receiving care, also called tier 1 includes the period when the child is receiving neonatal care, and 1 week after the care has ended
- leave after the child has stopped receiving care, called tier 2 includes the period outside tier 1 and before the end of 68 weeks from the date of the child's birth

Example of tier 1 leave when the child is still receiving care

Pat's baby is born early and is in neonatal care for 4 weeks in total from birth. Pat takes 2 weeks of paternity leave straight after the birth. They then take a further 2 consecutive weeks of neonatal care leave when their paternity leave ends. Pat has 2 more weeks of neonatal care leave accrued to take at a later time.

Example of tier 2 leave after the child has stopped receiving care

Pat's baby is now at home after 4 weeks in total in neonatal care. Pat gives notice to take the remaining 2 weeks of neonatal care in 1 month's time. This allows Pat to take time off as soon as they can to continue the baby's at home care.