

Dear Employer,

From 6 April 2025, employed parents with a baby in neonatal care became eligible for Neonatal Care Leave and Pay. This was a momentous step forward in terms of the support families receive when their lives are turned upside down by a neonatal admission, and around 60,000 parents are expected to benefit every year. Having a baby born premature or sick is a very traumatic time for new parents, and this can be exacerbated if they do not receive the flexibility and support they need from their employer.

This entitlement is great news for parents and their employers, but we know that it is likely to raise questions for employers who may be implementing this policy for the first time. We also know that you may have questions about how to best support your employees outside of the parameters of this entitlement.

Having successfully campaigned for this entitlement - and then worked closely with the Government to develop the policy details - we're here to help you introduce a Neonatal Care Leave and Pay policy which provides comprehensive support to your employees and that gives you the information you need to implement the entitlement into your business seamlessly.

I hope this briefing, which is full of practical examples and real-life scenarios, is helpful to you in thinking about how you might be able to better support your employees – and please don't hesitate to reach out to the team at Bliss if you have any questions. Contact details can be found at the end of this document.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lee-Davey
Chief Executive

Parental leave for parents of babies in neonatal care

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This document covers:

- What is Neonatal Care?
- Why do babies need their parents with them in neonatal care?
- What are employees entitled to?
- Understanding the detail
- How can you ensure your employees are fully supported?
- What are the benefits to employers?
- What do parents and employers say about neonatal leave and pay?

About Bliss

Bliss is the UK charity that champions the right of every baby born premature or sick to excellent neonatal care, experience and outcomes. We achieve this by improving care, giving voice to babies, and supporting parents to be partners in care.

As a charity, we are reliant on the generosity of individual and corporate supporters to [fund our vital work](#).

What is Neonatal Care?

One in seven babies born in the UK is admitted to neonatal care shortly after birth. Babies receive neonatal care either because they have been born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) or at full-term but sick. For example, they might have an infection, difficulty breathing or a genetic condition. Babies who are part of a twin or multiple pregnancy are more likely to require neonatal admission after birth.

For parents of these babies, the experience is life changing. Rather than taking their baby or babies home shortly after birth, their babies are admitted to a specialist hospital unit to receive care which ensures they have the best possible chance of survival and quality of life. How long a baby will stay in hospital varies, from days to weeks or months. For many parents, much of their parental leave is spent on the neonatal unit, not at home bonding with and caring for their babies.

A neonatal admission can come as a shock to families, either because they have had a healthy pregnancy without any complications up until birth, or because their baby has been born prematurely without any previous indication that this might happen. However, some families will know in advance that their baby is going to be unwell after birth. The mother, or their baby, may have been diagnosed with a condition during the pregnancy. For some families this will mean that the mother has been admitted to hospital for days or weeks before the birth.

A neonatal admission can have long term impacts on the mental health of parents. 80 per cent of parents told Bliss that their mental health was worsened by their experience, and many parents are diagnosed with post-natal depression and/or PTSD in the months after their baby is discharged home.

Why do babies need their parents with them in neonatal care?

Providing additional paid leave to employees if their baby is in neonatal care benefits their mental health and wellbeing, but importantly it also contributes to better outcomes for their baby both in the short and long term.

Babies have the best developmental outcomes when their parents can deliver hands-on care. This includes: feeding, kangaroo-care (skin-to-skin contact), administration of some medications, changing, bathing and comfort-holding their baby. Evidence shows long periods of direct care lead to:

- increased weight gain
- improved breastfeeding rates
- improved infant reflexes at term and better gross motor development at 4-5 years and
- reduced pain during invasive procedures

Involvement in care and decision-making is also critically important to parents and contributes to improved family well-being and cohesion. Physical and emotional closeness is crucial for forming strong parent-infant bonds - evidence demonstrates that parents who can be with their babies for long periods of time report increased parental confidence, and have reduced stress and anxiety scores. They also report *feeling* like parents – which may be key for their own perceptions of attachment to their babies.

What are employees entitled to?

The Neonatal Care Leave and Pay Act comprises the following elements:

- It entitles mothers, birthing-parents, fathers and non-birthing parents to a day one right to leave from work if their baby receives neonatal care for more than 7 continuous days, before the baby reaches 28 days of life. The length of leave will be based on how long their baby receives neonatal care, up to 12 weeks.
- It entitles employees to receive “statutory neonatal pay” for the duration of their baby’s neonatal care, up to 12 weeks if they meet minimum length of service and earning requirements (similar to other types of parental leave).
- Employees will have 68 weeks to take their leave and pay entitlement from the first date of admission to neonatal care, which means that they will be able to take their full entitlement to neonatal leave and pay in addition to other types of parental leave (including maternity, paternity, adoption and parental bereavement leave and pay).
- Employees will have different notice requirements based on when they intend to take their leave.
- Employees who qualify for maternity leave will take their accrued neonatal leave *after* their maternity leave ends, this is because maternity leave will be triggered by the birth of the baby

and cannot be paused and restarted. Similarly, if taking adoption leave, neonatal leave will be taken once this has ended.

- The interaction of other types of statutory parental leave (shared parental leave and paternity leave) with neonatal leave will be more flexible as these can be used at different times. For example, paternity leave can be used at any time within the first 52 weeks after birth

Understanding the detail

Definition of neonatal care

Neonatal care is usually understood to mean specialist care provided to a baby on a neonatal unit. This is a specialist service which is based at a hospital, and the care received depends on the needs of the baby.

A baby needs to receive 7 days or more of continuous neonatal care, before they are 28 days old, for your employee to begin accruing Neonatal Care Leave. However, the Neonatal Care Leave and Pay policy has been designed to support as many families as possible. As an employer it is important to understand what is considered 'neonatal care' within the legislation, as it may not be immediately obvious to your employee that they are entitled. Neonatal care includes:

- 1) Medical care received in a hospital. This can be in any ward – including a neonatal unit, transitional care unit, paediatric intensive care unit, other children's ward or surgical ward.

Example 1: A baby has been born at 30 weeks. They are transferred to the hospital's neonatal unit and receive 7 weeks 4 days of neonatal care before they are discharged home, accruing 7 weeks Neonatal Care Leave.

Example 2: A baby is born seemingly healthy and leaves hospital when their mother is discharged when they are 1 day old. After 5 days, the baby is readmitted to hospital as they are not gaining weight and become acutely unwell. They spend 3 days in Paediatric Intensive Care (PICU) and a further 3 weeks in hospital in a children's ward before they are discharged home. A total of 3 weeks Neonatal Care Leave is accrued.

- 2) Medical care that is received in any other place outside a hospital, if the following criteria are met:
 - The baby was an in-patient
 - The care is delivered under the direction of a consultant
 - The child is being monitored by healthcare professionals, including through appointments and visits

Many neonatal services provide community outreach. This is where a baby will receive ongoing care at home – this includes, but is not limited to: home oxygen, feeding via nasogastric (NG) tube and home phototherapy for jaundice. This practice enables a family to be together in the familiar environment of their home, but their lives are very much still impacted by this ongoing care. Their baby will likely have frequent home and hospital visits, and they may be required to stay at home and limit visitors to reduce risk of infection and illness.

Example 3: A baby is born at 30 weeks gestation and is cared for on a neonatal unit for 5 weeks 4 days. The hospital has an excellent neonatal outreach programme, and at this point the baby is discharged home on oxygen and with other ongoing support needs. The baby has regular home

visits from the neonatal outreach team, as well as appointments at the hospital with the consultant. The baby is discharged fully from neonatal services after another 7 weeks, receiving a total of 12 weeks 4 days of neonatal care, accruing 12 weeks Neonatal Care Leave.

3) A baby is receiving palliative or end-of-life care.

Example 4: A baby is born extremely poorly at 41 weeks and is transferred immediately to a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). After 1 week a decision is made to move from active care to palliative care, and the baby and their family are transferred to a hospice. The baby receives a further 3 weeks of palliative care at the hospice before they die. A total of 4 weeks Neonatal Care Leave has been accrued, and the baby's parents are also entitled to 2 weeks Parental Bereavement Leave.

Moving between settings

It is not uncommon for a baby to move from one type of unit to another, or to receive care in different settings. In fact, this is important for babies to receive the care most suited to their needs.

As long as a baby is receiving care **continuously** for 7 days or more, starting before they are 28 days old, Neonatal Care Leave will be accrued.

Example 1: A baby is born at 23 weeks gestation, and receives neonatal care continuously for 26 weeks. During this time they are cared for in several different neonatal units, and are discharged home under the neonatal outreach programme. A total of 12 weeks Neonatal Care Leave is accrued during this period, the maximum statutory provision.

Example 2: A baby is born at 40 weeks and is having difficulty keeping warm. They spend 4 days in transitional care with their mother before being discharged home. They are readmitted after several days at home due to jaundice, and spend 5 days in hospital before being discharged home again. The threshold of 7 continuous days in neonatal care was not met and so no Neonatal Care Leave was accrued.

Taking leave – Tier 1 and Tier 2

Employees will have 68 weeks to use their accrued Neonatal Care Leave. How this leave can be taken will depend on what other types of parental leave your employee is entitled to, and whether the leave is used while their baby is in hospital, or later in the 68 weeks. This is referred to as 'tier 1' and 'tier 2'.

Maternity Leave: Employees taking maternity leave will **only be able to take Tier 2 leave**. Maternity leave will be triggered by the birth of their baby and cannot be stopped and restarted later. These employees will need to take their maternity leave, and then their accrued Neonatal Care Leave all in one go once maternity leave is over.

Example 1: Sally's baby received neonatal care for 9 weeks and 4 days, accruing 9 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave. Sally took 39 weeks of Maternity Leave, and her 9 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave started as soon as her Maternity Leave ended. All of her accrued Neonatal Care Leave was taken in one go.

Paternity Leave: employees entitled to Paternity Leave will be able to take leave more flexibly. Tier 1 will allow them to take leave while their baby is still in hospital and can be used flexibly around any other leave that has been pre-booked or needs to be taken. They can also take Tier 2 leave if they wish to reserve some leave for when their baby has been discharged.

You can support your employee by being proactive in helping them to use Tier 1 Neonatal Care Leave flexibly around their paternity leave entitlement.

Example 2: Daniel's baby received neonatal care for 11 weeks and 3 days, accruing 11 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave. Daniel took 6 weeks of Tier 1 Neonatal Care Leave, followed by 2 weeks of paternity leave which he had pre-booked before his baby was born. He then returned to work while his baby was still in hospital and took his remaining 5 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave once his baby had come home, using Tier 2 leave.

Further details about Tier 1 and Tier 2 leave can be found in this table:

	Tier 1	Tier 2
What do the tiers mean?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1 starts when a baby begins receiving care and ends the 7th day after the day the baby stops receiving neonatal care • For twins/multiple births where more than one baby is receiving care, Tier 1 continues until the 7th day after the day the last baby stops receiving care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 2 starts 7 days after the baby is discharged from neonatal care • It runs through to 68 weeks after the baby's birth
Who is likely to use this leave?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dads and non-birthing parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mums and birthing parents • Dads and non-birthing parents taking leave more than 1 week after the baby is discharged
When can your employee take this leave?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the baby is still in the hospital and up to 7 days afterwards • It can fit around prebooked Parental Leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 1 week after the baby is discharged • After finishing Maternity Leave
How does your employee take this leave?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In non-consecutive week-long blocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consecutive weeks

Notice requirements & proof

Notice requirements will vary dependent on whether your employee is taking Tier 1 or Tier 2 leave, and are detailed in the table below.

You must not ask or compel your employee to share medical information about their baby's condition or treatments they are receiving. Your employee will decide how much information they feel comfortable sharing about their baby's care. Their entitlement to Neonatal Care Leave is not dependent on their baby's condition or prognosis.

	Tier 1	Tier 2
What notice does your employee have to give?	An employee should inform you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before they are due at work on their first day of Neonatal Care Leave or as soon as possible after that • On a weekly rolling basis for as long as they are entitled to take leave in Tier 1 • You and your employee may agree to waive the notice period 	Notice must be given in writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 days' notice for 1 week of leave • 28 days' notice for 2 or more consecutive weeks of leave • You and your employee may agree to waive the notice period

Twins and multiples

The entitlement to Neonatal Care Leave and Pay is per pregnancy, rather than per baby. If one of your employee's babies spends at least 7 continuous days receiving neonatal care, which starts within 28 days of their birth, they can claim Neonatal Care Leave. If two or more of their babies are receiving hospital care at the same time, they can only claim one week's leave for every continuous 7-day period that their babies are being treated.

If one of their babies is discharged and another of their babies is admitted for hospital care, they can start accruing leave for that baby too. Here is an example of how leave might be accrued in the case of multiple births.

Example scenarios	Days 0 to 7	Days 8 to 14	Days 15 to 21	Days 22 to 28	Leave accrued
Twins needing neonatal care together	Twin babies spend 14 full days in hospital care together				Parents accrue 2 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave each
Twins needing neonatal care at separate times	Baby 1 spends 7 full days in hospital care and is discharged		Baby 2 is admitted on day 15 and spends 14 full days in hospital care and is discharged		Parents accrue 3 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave each
Twins needing neonatal care at overlapping times	Twin babies go into neonatal care together. Baby 1 is discharged after 7 days, baby 2 stays for 28 days				Parents accrue 4 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave each

How can you ensure your employees are fully supported?

The new statutory entitlement to Neonatal Care Leave and Pay will be extremely beneficial for parents. However, as an employer who wants to go above and beyond for your employees you might want to consider going one step further by looking at:

Setting an enhanced level of pay

As a statutory entitlement, neonatal pay will be mandated at the statutory pay level (currently £187.18 per week). It is welcome that the entitlement will be paid but providing neonatal pay at this rate will be a serious barrier for many – just as statutory maternity and paternity pay rates currently are. Most families cannot have one or both incomes drop by such a significant amount for more than a few days before it becomes a barrier to taking time off. This is clearly highlighted in the uptake of full maternity and paternity leave in families on lower incomes – the lowest paid employees are less likely to take their full paternity leave, and the average length of maternity leave remains at 39 weeks, when maternity pay ends.

Having a baby is already an expensive time, but at Bliss we know that the experience of having a premature or sick baby can be even more costly. **Consider paying neonatal pay at 100% of salary, or mirroring your existing enhanced maternity and paternity pay provision – paying neonatal pay at the same rate you offer new parents.**

Maximum length of leave and pay

While 12 weeks will be enough for most families, a very small number of babies will spend more than 12 weeks in neonatal care. Consider raising the cap beyond 12 weeks for full paid leave or having some provision in your policy to offer more time at a lower rate. For example, Bliss' own neonatal leave and pay policy provides for 16 weeks at full pay, then any additional time that a baby is in neonatal care as unpaid leave.

Notice periods

Notice periods vary dependent on whether your employee is intending to take Tier 1 or Tier 2 leave. The legislation does allow for employers to waive the notice period with the agreement of their employee – you may want to consider doing this to reduce the burden on your employee at an already stressful time, and also to potentially reduce the burden on your company by aligning with existing processes.

Tier 1: While it is set out that employees should provide weekly notice on a rolling basis while they are entitled to Tier 1 leave, for some – particularly those with babies born very prematurely or whose babies are born extremely unwell – they will be advised by medical staff that their baby is likely to spend weeks or months receiving care. In these circumstances, you may wish to waive weekly updates, and instead agree for your employee to keep you informed as they feel able to, or when they know their circumstances are changing.

Tier 2: The policy sets out that employees need to give 15 days' notice, in writing, to take one week leave; or 28 days' notice, in writing, for two weeks leave or more. You can waive this if you wish, or change it with agreement from your employee. You may want to consider a discussion about using accrued Neonatal Care Leave with employees taking maternity leave around the time you would usually be in touch to discuss returning to work and using accrued annual leave etc. and agreeing an approach at that time, rather than using the timeframes set out in legislation.

You may also want to consider bringing the notice period for Tier 2 in line with requirements you have in place for other types of planned leave, e.g. annual leave.

You may also want to download the [Employer's Technical Guidance](#) from the Department for Business and Trade for further examples of how the entitlement applies in different scenarios.

Signposting to Bliss for information and support

A neonatal experience will be a turbulent and confusing time for your employees, and while Neonatal Care Leave and Pay will be an enormous support, understanding the entitlement may be tricky. You can help by signposting your employee to Bliss information and support to ensure they have everything they need to navigate this difficult time:

- [Parent FAQs on Neonatal Care Leave and Pay](#)
- [Emotional Support](#)
- [Information and support hub for financial and practical information](#)
- [Information on all parts of a neonatal journey](#)
- [Stories from other families](#)

Other ways to support your employees

Giving employees additional leave and pay is not the only way you can help support them through this difficult time. Good communication and flexibility are key to providing a supportive work environment. Here are some recommendations from parents:

- **Communication:** ensure communication is sensitive and that the frequency and mode are dictated by your employee. For example, discuss arranging some keeping in touch days. Ask whether they are happy to be contacted and what the best way to do this is for them e.g., by email, text or phone.
- **Celebration:** while we understand it can feel awkward, it is still important to acknowledge the birth of a baby. If you would usually send a card to an employee who has had a baby, do – not celebrating the birth of their baby can be another thing parents miss out on, there are lots of ideas of premature/NICU baby cards and gifts online.
- **Flexibility:** when it is time for your employee to return to work, be flexible. For some parents, their baby may still be in neonatal care, and they will require flexibility to visit the hospital, look after other children and support their partner. For others, their child may continue to have regular appointments after discharge, so will require flexibility from you as their employer to help them be there for their child and partner.

You may also want to ensure that your employee receives appropriate support by:

- **Signposting** to your organisational psychological support provision (employee assistance programme or counselling etc) and to relevant charities such as Bliss.
- Provide **support for line managers** to understand the change in the law, their role, and managing workloads if there is unexpected disruption, which is something that Bliss can facilitate as an additional training tool for staff.

What are the benefits to employers?

Most employers want to provide more support to their employees if they have a baby admitted to neonatal care – they just lack a framework to do so. The Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act

provides an excellent opportunity to support your employees during a challenging period of their lives.

Neonatal Care Leave and Pay will support you as an employer by:

- Ensuring that the leave parents take is predictable (as far as it can be) for them as well as for you as an employer
- Improving retention by giving parents the time they need before returning to work
- Improving your offer to prospective employees if you can enhance your Neonatal Care Leave and Pay offer beyond the statutory minimum requirements.
- Helping your employees focus on their job when they're back at work – rather than worrying about a baby still unwell in hospital.

What do parents and employers say about having extra neonatal leave and pay?

While only coming into effect as a statutory right from April 2025, some employers have had a neonatal leave and pay policy in place for some time. Here are some examples of how employees have benefitted from this support, and how employers have found having this policy in place:

Alice said: *"My work was incredibly supportive. They gave me around three weeks of compassionate leave and ended up introducing a new policy, where you can get up to 12 weeks of fully paid leave if you have a neonatal experience.*

"So in total, I was off work for nearly 17 months once I added on my annual leave. The twins were one (corrected) by the time I went back to work, so I thankfully managed to have some proper time with them which was taken from me when they were born early."

Read more about Alice's story here: <https://www.bliss.org.uk/story/reflecting-on-our-neonatal-experience-is-tough-alices-story>

Pete said: *"Fortunately, my employer was incredibly supportive and I was told from the start that I could take as much time off as I needed.*

"Although I could not have asked for more from my employer, and felt incredibly grateful for their supportive approach to the situation, I was never quite sure of the terms on which I was being allowed to take this extended leave. Had my leave been under the terms of Neonatal Leave and Pay there would undoubtedly have been more clarity and structure, which perhaps would have taken off some of the pressure I was starting to put on myself to return to work. It would also have taken the decision out of my employers' hands as to how to manage the situation..."

For this reason, I strongly feel that the Neonatal Leave and Pay Bill is mutually beneficial for both employee and employer."

Read more about Pete's story here: <https://www.bliss.org.uk/story/hope-neonatal-care-leave-pay-gives-parents-time-to-navigate-stressful-period>

James Goodman, Tesco UK People Director, said: *"We were really pleased to introduce paid neonatal leave for the first time in September 2023, ahead of government legislation.*

"We see it as an important part of a raft of family-friendly benefits we offer to support colleagues' wellbeing and to help them to maintain a healthy work-life balance, especially around major life events."

Nisha Marwaha, Director of Diversity, Equality & Inclusion at Virgin Media O2, said: *"We understand how worrying it can be when a baby is born prematurely or sick and needs to spend additional time in hospital.*

"That's why we're proud to be one of the first companies in the UK to have introduced paid neonatal leave more than two years ahead of it becoming a legal requirement. This ensures our employees can be away from work with our full support and be there for their family when it counts."

Read more about employer's experiences here: <https://www.bliss.org.uk/news/top-uk-employers-say-new-bliss-backed-rights-will-transform-working-lives-of-parents-of-sick-babies>

Contact

For further information please contact Josie Anderson, Policy, Research and Campaigns Manager e: josiea@bliss.org.uk

As the UK's leading neonatal charity, championing the rights of every baby born premature or sick, Bliss has campaigned for many years to bring this change in law. This has only been possible because of funding from dedicated fundraisers and Corporate Partners who have supported us. If you or your company would like to join us as we continue our fight to improve the outcomes of babies in neonatal care, get in [touch today](#).