

Taking maternity leave

You can choose to either:

- start your maternity leave from up to 11 weeks before your baby is due
- work right up until you give birth

After your baby is born, by law you must:

- start your maternity leave (if you have not already)
- take off at least 2 weeks (4 weeks if you work in a factory) – this is known as ‘compulsory maternity leave’
- take all your maternity leave in one go

Your maternity leave and pay ends when you go back to work.

3. Changing the date you start maternity leave

If you want to change the start date of your maternity leave, you must give your employer 28 days’ notice, or agree a new date together.

When maternity leave can start early

If you’re absent from work

If you’re off because of your pregnancy in the 4 weeks before your baby is due, your maternity leave starts automatically the day after your first day off.

If your baby arrives early

If your baby is born earlier than expected or is premature, your maternity leave starts straight away.

You’ll need to let your employer know as soon as you can. You can ask your partner, a friend or a family member to do this if you need to.

You do not have to give your employer any formal evidence, but your workplace might have a policy that needs you to contact them as soon as possible.

If your baby is late

If you’d planned to take maternity leave from a specific date

If your baby is late and you had told your employer a specific date you want to start maternity leave, you can still start the leave from that date.

You just need to tell your employer the date when you have given birth so you start compulsory maternity leave from then.

If you'd planned to work up to when your baby is born

If you told your employer you want start maternity leave the day after your baby's born, you do not need to change anything.

If you want to start your maternity leave early, you can ask your employer.

If you have a partner, their paternity leave starts when the baby is born.

Holiday

You still build up ('accrue') your holiday entitlement during maternity leave. It's a good idea to talk with your employer before you go on leave.

You cannot take holiday during maternity leave as this would end your maternity leave and pay.

You could arrange whether to take your holiday entitlement before or after your maternity leave.

[Find out more about holiday entitlement.](#)

If your contract is due to end

If you have a temporary or fixed-term contract due to end while you're on maternity leave, your employer does not have to renew it.

It's against the law for the reason not to renew it to be your sex, pregnancy or maternity.

You can ask your employer to give you the reason in writing. If you do not think it's fair, you can [raise a formal complaint \('grievance'\)](#).

[Download our guide to redundancy rights when pregnant or on maternity leave](#) (PDF, 299KB, 13 pages).

If there's a stillbirth, miscarriage or your baby dies

You still get maternity leave and pay if:

- your baby is stillborn after the 24th week of pregnancy
- your baby only lives for a short time after birth at any stage of pregnancy

If you're eligible for [parental bereavement leave and pay](#), you have the right to take this after you finish your maternity leave.

If you have a miscarriage or stillbirth before 24 weeks, you're not entitled to maternity leave and pay. You could talk with your employer and they might offer you other support, for example time off or flexible working. [Find out more about telling your employer about a death or miscarriage.](#)

You'll need to tell your employer as soon as you can. You can ask your partner, a friend or a family member to do this if you need to.

You do not have to give your employer any formal evidence, but your workplace might have a policy that needs you to contact them as soon as you can.

You can find help and support from:

- [Child Bereavement UK](#)
- [Miscarriage Association](#)