

Neonatal care leave policy template

Parents of babies born on or after 6 April 2025 who are admitted to neonatal care within 28 days of birth, for a continuous stay of 7 days or more, have a day-one right to up to 12 weeks of neonatal care leave - on top of maternity, paternity or shared parental leave, not instead of it. Statutory neonatal care pay has extra conditions: 26 weeks' service, average earnings of at least £129 a week, and a rate of the lower of £194.32 a week or 90% of average weekly earnings (gov.uk). The template below turns all of that into handbook-ready clauses.

What does a neonatal care leave policy need to cover?

This is one of the newer statutory rights, so most handbooks simply don't have it yet - and the parents who need it find out what they're entitled to from a hospital ward. A good policy does three things: states the entitlement accurately (which babies, how much leave, from day one); explains clearly how the leave stacks with maternity, paternity and shared parental leave, because that interaction is where the confusion lives; and separates the leave (day-one) from the pay (conditional), so nobody is promised money the statute doesn't guarantee. Just as important is tone - this policy will be read on a hospital ward, so the process clauses should bend towards the family, not the paperwork.

The template

Copy everything from here to the end of clause 10 straight into your handbook, then replace each [bracketed placeholder] with your own details. No download needed - the page is the template.

1. Purpose

This policy explains how [Company name] supports employees whose baby needs neonatal care, including the statutory right to neonatal care leave and pay. It applies from [date]. Having a baby in neonatal care is frightening and exhausting; our aim is that no colleague going through it has to worry about work as well.

2. Who is covered

Neonatal care leave is available from the first day of employment to parents - including a partner of the baby's mother, and adoptive parents - who have responsibility for the baby's upbringing and take the leave to care for the baby. It applies where a baby born on or after 6 April 2025 is admitted to neonatal care within 28 days of birth and remains in neonatal care for a continuous period of 7 days or more.

3. How much leave

Eligible employees may take up to 12 weeks of neonatal care leave, broadly reflecting time the baby spends in neonatal care beyond the first week. The leave is taken in blocks of at least a week, and [Company name] will agree the pattern with the employee based on their circumstances.

4. On top of other family leave

Neonatal care leave is in addition to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave - it does not replace or reduce them. In practice this most often means a father or partner can stay at the hospital after paternity leave ends, or family leave can be extended at the end so that time at home is not swallowed by weeks spent in hospital.

5. Pay during leave

Statutory neonatal care pay applies where the employee has at least 26 weeks' continuous service and average weekly earnings of at least £129. The statutory rate is the lower of £194.32 per week or 90% of the employee's average weekly earnings. [Company name] [enhances neonatal care leave to [full pay / X% of pay] for [all / up to X weeks of] leave / pays the statutory rate]. Employees who do not qualify for statutory pay may still take the leave, [unpaid / paid at [rate] as a company enhancement].

6. Telling us

Tell [line manager / HR] as soon as you reasonably can - a message is enough, and it can come from someone on your behalf. We will confirm your leave and sort the formal notice requirements with you afterwards; during the first days of an admission, your family comes first. Formal notice is given via [CoDash / the HR system / HR] and includes the baby's date of birth, the date neonatal care started and ended, and the dates of leave requested.

7. Terms during leave

All terms and conditions except pay continue during neonatal care leave. Holiday accrues as normal, continuous service is unaffected, and the employee has the right to return to the same job.

8. Support beyond the leave

Managers should offer, not wait to be asked: flexibility around hospital visiting on working days, a reduced or adjusted pattern on return, and access to [EAP / support resources]. We will not contact employees about routine work matters during neonatal care leave unless they ask us to.

9. Protection

No employee will suffer a detriment, or be dismissed, because they took or sought to take neonatal care leave. Concerns should be raised with [HR contact] or through the grievance procedure.

10. Review

This policy is owned by [HR / named role] and reviewed [annually], or sooner if statutory rates or rules change. Questions go to [contact].

How to adapt it

Honest guidance on the choices the brackets leave open:

- Keep leave and pay separate in your head. The leave is a day-one right; the pay is not. If your policy blurs them, someone with 4 months' service will believe they're owed £194.32 a week when the statute says otherwise. Clause 5 keeps the two apart - keep it that way, and check the current figures each April against gov.uk and our statutory rates guide.
- Consider enhancing pay - the exposure is small. Neonatal admissions of 7+ days are mercifully rare in any one company, so topping up to full pay costs little in expectation and means everything to the family it reaches. If you enhance other family leave, matching it here is the consistent choice.
- Soften the notice mechanics. The statutory scheme has formal notice requirements, but clause 6 deliberately promises to sort them after confirming the leave. A policy that leads with forms will simply not be read by a parent sleeping in a hospital chair.
- Brief managers on the stacking rule. The most common real-world error is a manager assuming neonatal weeks come out of paternity or maternity leave. They don't - clause 4 exists so managers can be corrected by the handbook rather than by a tribunal.
- This template isn't legal advice. It reflects the statutory scheme as at 8 August 2026. Edge cases - multiple births, adoption timing, a baby moving in and out of neonatal care - are exactly where you should take proper advice rather than improvising.

Running the policy day to day

The hard part operationally is that this leave arrives unplanned, mid-crisis, and interleaves with other family leave. In CoDash neonatal care leave is a built-in statutory leave type alongside carer's and bereavement leave: HR can record it on someone's behalf, it sits correctly next to maternity or paternity leave on the calendar, and the return date stays visible to the manager. See time off and absence.

A free template from CoDash - codash.co.uk/templates. Edit it to match how your company actually works, and take advice on anything unusual.