

Parental leave change to give fathers year off work

'Flexible parental leave' to allow fathers to take year off work but cabinet in disagreement over impact on business, say reports



The new system will mean that either the mother or father can claim parental leave and the allowance after two weeks. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Fathers will be able to take the majority of the first year of a baby's life off work if the mother goes back to work under coalition proposals, it has been reported.

Under new legislation planned for next year, if a mother is the [family's](#) main breadwinner, she can go back to work after two weeks and the father can claim "flexible parental leave", the [Daily Telegraph](#) said.

Implementation of the scheme will not take place until October 2015 following a disagreement in cabinet over the impact on business, the paper said.

A government source told the Telegraph: "This is being introduced slowly and with great care to ensure that it does not undermine business during the difficult economic times.

"But it was a coalition pledge and it is important to both the prime minister and the Liberal Democrats that both parents should be supported to spend time with their new children."

Under the current system, mothers are legally entitled to 90% of their earnings for the first six weeks after birth. They can then receive a maternity allowance – equivalent to either 90% of earnings or £135.45 a week, whichever is the lowest – for an additional 33 weeks. Some employers offer more generous terms.

Fathers are entitled to two weeks of paternity leave and mothers can transfer their leave to their partners after the first six months.

The new system will mean that either the mother or father can claim parental leave and the allowance after two weeks.

The source added: "This has taken a long time to develop as the system has to be robust enough to prevent fraud, with both parents claiming.

"It was decided to keep the current default system of assistance being given to women. There are also other safeguards to prevent vulnerable mothers, or those in families which do not function well, from losing their entitlements. Absent fathers will not benefit."

The campaign group Maternity Action said the move would increase flexibility in parental leave.

A spokeswoman said: "This is a long-overdue change which recognises that fathers as well as mothers can care for their baby. The increased flexibility will offer families real choices about managing work and caring responsibilities.

"We are mystified at claims that this is a burden on business. The proposals allow families to share existing entitlements. Many people are unaware that statutory maternity pay is reimbursed by government and the same arrangements apply to shared parental leave."

'Barriers' stop fathers taking paternity leave - report



Few fathers take more than two weeks statutory paternity leave

A lack of support from employers is preventing many men from taking paternity leave, a report has found.

A survey of employees and managers found that a quarter of new fathers took no paternity leave at all.

Fewer than one in 10 took more than their two weeks statutory leave.

The research by the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) blamed "ingrained" attitudes among employers, and concerns among new fathers that they could not afford to take leave.

Last year the government announced plans to allow parents to share their maternity and paternity leave - changes are scheduled to come in April 2015.

But the ILM said its research suggested the changes would have little impact if attitudes of employers were not addressed as well.

"The introduction of shared parental leave is a crucial step towards enabling more women to progress into senior roles," said Charles Elvin, ILM chief executive.

Many dads simply can't afford to take time off, particularly as employers rarely top up their statutory pay"

End Quote Frances O'Grady TUC director general

"Yet our research revealed cultural barriers are impeding the uptake of both two weeks statutory paternity leave and additional paternity leave."

Pay worries

He said there remained a "cultural expectation" within organisations that women rather than men will be the ones taking extended periods away from the workplace.

The report also said low levels of paternity pay discouraged new fathers, with just 9% surveyed receiving more than two weeks on full pay.

Responding to the report, Frances O'Grady, secretary general of the TUC, the trade union body, said pay was the major concern.

"Many dads simply can't afford to take time off, particularly as employers rarely top up their statutory pay."

Currently, employed fathers are entitled to either one or two weeks' paid paternity leave, though additional leave is also given if the mother returns to work and is not claiming statutory maternity pay.

Government plans involve extending this flexibility, allowing parents of newborns to exchange and share their leave.

"We want the introduction of shared parental leave to drive a real cultural shift and help working dads play a greater role in their child's early months," a government spokesperson said.

"Employers too can gain from a system which allows them to keep talented women in the workforce and have more motivated and productive staff."

