

Paid Parental Leave

Frequently Asked Questions

What is paid parental leave?

Paid parental leave is a benefit that provides up to 12 weeks of paid leave for an eligible employee to bond with his or her newborn, adopted child, or foster-to-adopt child. The program began as a pilot in 2016 and is now a regular benefit available to eligible King County employees.

Who is eligible for the paid parental leave benefit?

This benefit is available to all qualified leave-eligible employees who have been employed with the County for at least six continuous months at the time of the birth, adoption or foster-to-adopt placement (the “qualifying event”). This includes term-limited temporary employees (TLTs) and benefited part-time employees, but not short-term temporary employees (STTs) or non-benefited employees.

To qualify, an employee must be either non-represented or represented by a union that has signed an agreement to participate in the program at the time of the qualifying event. See the list of [participating unions](#).

Does paid parental leave cover both men and women?

Yes, both mothers and fathers are eligible for paid parental leave. If both parents work for King County, they are each eligible for up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave.

Can an employee receive more than one allotment of paid parental leave in the same 12-month period (i.e., What if an employee has two qualifying events in a 12-month period)?

An eligible employee will receive up to 12-weeks of paid parental leave for each qualifying event. The birth or adoption of multiples (e.g., twins) only qualifies as one event. If a second qualifying event occurs before the end of the original 12-month period, then agency human resource personnel will re-run the paid parental leave calculation to determine new eligible paid parental leave benefits.

What documentation is required to receive paid parental leave?

Depending on the type of paid parental leave there are a number of required forms. The employee must inform his or her human resources representative and/or immediate supervisor of the need for paid parental leave at least 30 days in advance. This is typically accomplished by submitting a *Protected Family and Medical Leave Request Form*.

Additionally, an employee is also required to submit documentation that verifies the birth, adoption or foster-to-adopt placement. If the paid parental leave is for bonding with a foster-to-adopt placement, then a *Foster-to-Adopt Form* is also required.

Can paid parental leave be used on a part-time or intermittent basis?

Paid parental leave may be used all at once (continuously) or on a part-time (intermittent) basis. For paid parental leave to be used on a part-time (intermittent) basis, the leave schedule must be consistent with the department’s operational needs and be approved in writing prior to the beginning of the leave.

Isn't the benefit unfair or inequitable because people with low leave balances will get a greater benefit? Doesn't this penalize people who "planned" for their leave?

Many different options were considered when researching and developing a paid parental leave program for King County. When selecting which option to use for the pilot program, it was important to the Executive that the program be financially responsible, equitable, and easy to administer. Ultimately, requiring employees with leave balances to use some of their accrued leave was the option that best met those goals.

While the benefit may not be equal for all employees, it provides equitable outcomes. This option also supports the County's equity and social justice principles by reducing disparities between how low- and high-wage employees take leave. Additionally, it enables the County to provide up to 12 weeks of paid leave for all eligible employees in a way that is cost-effective.

Isn't this unfair to employees who don't have children?

King County offers a substantially similar set of benefits to all of our employees. However, depending on what stage an employee is at in their life, they will use different benefits to different degrees. This is true regarding vacation and sick leave, in addition to health benefits, the employee assistance program, and retirement planning.

The U.S. is the only developed country in the world that does not mandate any type of paid leave for new parents. Science shows that newborns' earliest experiences are the most important to their long-term success. For children to flourish, they need time to bond with their parents. King County is committed to promoting best starts for kids, including our employees' kids.

How will this benefit work for employees who work part-time or who don't have a regular schedule?

If part-time employees meet the other eligibility requirements – that they have been with the County for more than six continuous months, that they are leave-eligible, and that they are either not represented or represented by a union that has agreed to participate in the program – then they can receive paid parental leave.

The paid parental leave allotment will be prorated based on the employee's regular schedule. For example, if an employee is scheduled to work 24 hours-per-week (or .6 of an FTE), he or she would still be eligible for 12 weeks of leave, but at 24 hours per week (versus 40 hours for a full-time employee). For employees who work variable hours, it will be calculated based on their average hours over the previous six months.

Does this time count towards seniority?

Whether or not paid parental leave counts toward seniority depends on the specifics of an employee's collective bargaining agreement. Typically, paid leave does count toward seniority, but it is important to check with your department or agency's human resources staff to confirm the details in the individual contracts.

Why are an employee's existing leave balances factored into the paid parental leave benefit?

In analyzing the costs and benefits of a paid parental leave program, staff considered many different options.

The Executive had several priorities when considering which option to recommend. Those priorities included that the program have equitable outcomes for employees and be financially responsible and sustainable. The Executive and Council also shared a goal of providing 12 weeks of paid parental leave.

Ultimately, the option that best met those objectives was the one that asked employees to use some of their accrued leave. This is consistent with best practices, achieves an equitable outcome for all employees, and keeps the program affordable.

How do I calculate how much leave I am eligible to receive?

The amount of leave an employee is eligible for is calculated on the day of the birth, adoption or foster-to-adopt placement. On that day, the employee will receive the amount of supplemental leave that is needed to give the employee a total of 12 weeks when combined with the employee's existing accrued leave (except for one week of sick leave and one week of vacation leave, or the equivalent for Benefit Time).

For example, if an employee has three weeks of vacation leave and two weeks of sick leave, two weeks of his or her vacation and one week of sick leave will be applied towards the paid parental leave, and the employee would receive nine weeks of supplemental paid parental leave, for a total of 12 weeks of paid leave.

To get an idea of how many hours you may be eligible for, you can use the [Paid Parental Leave Calculator](#). Actual paid parental leave benefits are determined by agency human resource personnel.

How does the paid parental leave work with respect to Family Medical Leave (FML) and King County Family Medical Leave (KCFML)?

Paid parental leave is protected leave, meaning an employee's job cannot be eliminated while he or she is out, except in cases of budget-related layoffs. Paid parental leave will run concurrently with the County's family and medical leave, as well as federal and state family medical leave to the fullest extent possible.

Employees should discuss FML, KCFML and paid parental leave processes and requirements with their agency human resource representative.

When does my paid parental leave expire?

Paid parental leave expires 12 months from the date of the qualifying event. After 12 months, any remaining unused paid parental leave hours will be unavailable and removed.

How does my paid parental leave interact with other paid leave accruals?

After the hours have been awarded, the employee can use the leave in any order he or she chooses, and may use the supplemental leave first. The employee may also choose to only use the supplemental leave. If you are a represented employee, be sure to review the specifics of your individual collective bargaining agreement.

What happens if I choose not to return to work after taking my paid parental leave?

An employee who does not return to work for at least six months of continuous service after taking his or her paid parental leave will be required to reimburse King County for the salary received while on supplemental paid parental leave. Employees agree to this when signing the *Protected Family and Medical Leave Request Form*.

Will I be eligible for paid parental leave if my position will expire before I can return to work for at least six months (e.g., a TLT position)?

If an otherwise eligible employee will not be able to return to work for six months of continuous service following the leave because the position is scheduled to end, then the employee is not eligible and paid parental leave benefits will not be awarded. This would mainly occur with term limited positions, but also applies to positions that are scheduled for layoff.

What happens if an employee is on special duty when they start taking paid parental leave?

As required by the special duty policy, if an employee will be on leave for more than 30 days, his or her special duty assignment will end and the employee will be returned to his or her base position. Therefore, in most cases, while out on paid parental leave the employee will be compensated at the rate of his or her base position (i.e., no special duty pay).

For an employee to continue in a special duty assignment when he or she returns to work, the employee would need to be re-appointed to that position.