

We will often suggest modified duties to avoid these hazardous conditions. Employers must try to work within these restrictions. If they can't, then you will need to go on disability. These situations can be complex and need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. The best thing to do is to start by speaking with your employer. They may be willing to work with you.

Warranted Sick Leave/Disability

If a woman becomes ill because of a complication of the pregnancy such as high blood pressure or threatened premature labour, sick leave or disability leave is necessary. The woman's employer will decide what she is eligible for based on the doctor's information. Doctors charge for forms as per the Alberta Medical Association Guidelines.

Disability companies must rule on a case-by-case basis. Disability coverage may be denied after a woman has already stopped working. This usually happens when the reasons to stop work are felt to be part of a normal pregnancy.

Work Stress

Many women are worried about job stress affecting their babies. It is hard to study the effect of stress on babies, as everyone tolerates stress differently. *A stressful workplace is not usually a valid reason to start sick leave* unless your symptoms are very bad and time off work would be needed even if you were not pregnant. Pregnancy is a good time, however, to look at your work situation and try to decrease workplace stress.

Physician Ethics

Taking time off work during pregnancy has become a complex issue. It helps to remember that doctors must make recommendations based on health issues that they can support with medical evidence.

More Resources

1. For a guide on regulations for Maternity and Parental leave, EI benefits, and how to apply for them, call 403-297-6571 or go to: www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/Becoming_a_parent_Eng.pdf
2. Contact your Human Relations Department for information specific to your employment situation (e.g., eligibility for medical benefits/EI top up).
3. For workplace exposure concerns call Alberta Workplace Health and Safety at 1-866-415-8690 or visit them online.
4. You can also get more information by calling Motherisk Hotline at 1-416-813-6780 or visiting their website at www.motherisk.org

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health information

Work Issues in Pregnancy



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Maternity leave and benefit issues can be confusing to understand and apply for. This handout will help make some sense of the issues, as well as give you some resources.

Maternity/Parental Leave (Time off)

Alberta employees are allowed, by law, up to one year of unpaid, job-protected leave when their child is born. Birth mothers can take up to 52 consecutive weeks off work (15 weeks maternity leave and 37 weeks parental leave). Birth fathers can take up to 37 weeks of parental leave. Parental leave can be taken by one parent or split between both. If combined, the leave can't add up to more than 37 weeks. Consecutive means that there was no interruption in work. To qualify, you must have 52 weeks of consecutive employment with your employer (full-time or part-time).

Maternity leave can begin anytime within 12 weeks of your estimated due date. You must give your employer 6 weeks written notice of the date you are starting your leave. They may ask for a medical note confirming your due date. There is a fee for this service. If you need to go on medical leave, you must give a medical note within 2 weeks of your last work date.

Maternity/Parental Benefits (Money)

Alberta employees are eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) for up to 50 weeks (15 weeks of medical/maternity leave and 35 weeks of parental leave).

This benefit can start when you choose to take your maternity leave. The basic benefit rate is 55% of your average insured earnings, up to a maximum amount per week of about \$400.00. If you are a low-income family, you may qualify for 80% of weekly earnings to a maximum of \$400.00 a week.

If a birth father takes parental leave and qualifies for EI, he is eligible for up to 35 weeks of pay.

To receive maternity and/or parental benefits, you must fill out an EI application online at or in person at your local Service Canada office (call 1-800-206-7218 for locations). Website: www.servicecanada.gc.ca

What if I don't qualify for EI?

If you don't qualify for EI and are a low-income family, you may be eligible for income support through the Alberta Adult Health Benefit. Please call 1-877-469-5437. You may also qualify for subsidies for prescriptions and dental care. If you having trouble negotiating these services, please contact Best Beginnings (403-228-8221). They will try to help you.

Normal Pregnancy Issues

During pregnancy, employers often ask for sick notes and/or disability forms from their doctors for all kinds of issues.

Pregnancy can be an exciting time, but it is also an uncomfortable and tiring time for many women. However, normal pregnancy is not an illness. A pregnant woman who is otherwise well can work up until the day she goes into labour if she wants to.

We expect that most women will be *tired* at the end of their pregnancy and will not be sleeping well. It is common for women to *have back discomfort, sharp pains from uterine ligaments and pelvic bone stretching, heartburn, and trouble walking.*

Because you can choose to start your maternity leave any time in the last 12 weeks of pregnancy, we suggest you only begin maternity leave early if you not tolerating your work situation because of late pregnancy issues.

Top Up Disability Pay

Many employers provide automatic disability top up pay for a certain number of weeks before or after delivery. If your company offers top up pay, *you will not need any special diagnosis* from the doctor. If your company asks the doctor to decide what the top up period is, six weeks is usually suggested for an uncomplicated vaginal delivery (as per Alberta Perinatal Health Program's Reference Guide). Complications are looked at on a case-by-case basis.

There may be some confusion if employers tell employees they can have up to 17 weeks disability pay. The full 17 weeks is not automatically given to every pregnant employee. Seventeen weeks is the maximum disability time allowed if you have major complications during the pregnancy or delivery.

Employer Convenience Issues

It is not unusual for employers to put pressure on pregnant employees to get a sick note from their doctor. An example of this would be the principal of a school asking a teacher who is pregnant and due September 30 to get a sick note for the last month so she does not have to start a new school year and then leave. If the teacher is not sick the doctor **cannot** write a sick note. The patient must decide whether she wants to start her maternity leave early or to work until closer to her due date even though it is inconvenient for her employer.

Modified Duties/Hazardous Exposures

Some work situations may be very physically demanding, or may expose the patient to conditions that are felt to be unsafe in pregnancy. For example, someone who has to climb ladders at work would be at a higher risk of falling. If you have concerns about your safety at work, please speak with your doctor.