Extension of Maternity Leave and Benefit in cases of Premature Births

From 1st October 2017, the period for which maternity benefit is paid is being extended in cases where a baby is born prematurely. The extended period of benefit will be equivalent to the duration between the actual date of birth of the premature baby and the date when the maternity leave was expected to commence (i.e. ordinarily two weeks before the expected date of birth). This new measure, which takes effect for premature babies born on or after Sunday, 1st October, will increase the duration of maternity leave and the associated maternity benefit to be paid in cases where a baby is born prematurely.


The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, T.D welcomed the measure saying:

“I am delighted to announce today that maternity leave and benefit will be extended to support families at one of the most difficult times in their lives. The Government is acutely aware of the many pressures that families with pre-term babies face and this new measure to extend maternity leave and benefit will ensure additional support for families at a time when nurturing a new life can be daunting and stressful.

This is part of a suite of benefits that the Government is introducing to improve the lives of parents, would-be parents, and their children, including Minister Simon Harris’s intention to introduce funding to assist couples seeking fertility treatments. This Government is determined to offer a helping hand when it is needed, particularly to young families.”

Commenting on the extension of maternity leave and benefits in cases of premature births, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan T.D said:
“There are strong compassionate and practical reasons to make specific provisions for additional maternity leave and benefit where babies are born prematurely.

My Department, which has overall responsibility for the maternity protection acts, will work closely with Minister Doherty and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and with the office of the Parliamentary Counsel to make sure that this legislation is drafted in as timely a manner as possible."

Under the new arrangements, in addition to the current 26 weeks of paid maternity leave a mother will be entitled to an additional period of paid maternity leave. The additional period will commence at the end of the standard 26 week period of paid maternity leave. The additional period to be added will be the number of weeks from the baby’s actual date of birth up to two weeks before the expected date of confinement which would have been the 37th week of the pregnancy, at which point the current entitlement to 26 weeks leave and benefit would normally begin.

So, for example where a baby is born in the 30th week of gestation the mother would have an additional entitlement of approximately 7 weeks of maternity leave and benefit i.e. from the date of birth in the 30th week to the two weeks before the expected date of confinement. This additional period will be added to the mother’s normal entitlement to 26 weeks of maternity leave and benefit.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection can confirm that it will apply the additional weeks of benefit for pre-term infants born on or after October 1st where the mother meets the ordinary qualifying criteria for maternity benefit.

We advise new mothers of pre-term babies to claim their 26 weeks of Maternity Benefit as usual and to contact the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection or drop an email to maternityben@welfare.ie including their contact details. They will then be contacted by the Department to ensure that any additional benefit payment is made.

ENDS
Note for Editor

Maternity Benefit is a payment made for 26 weeks to women who are on maternity leave from work and covered by social insurance (PRSI). Application is normally made 6 weeks before commencement of maternity leave or 12 weeks in the case of a self-employed person. The minimum rate of payment was increased to €235 per week (previously €230) from 13th March 2017. A person in receipt of certain social welfare payments can receive half-rate maternity benefit.