

Fertility Policy Guide

This document is designed to be used alongside the fertility policy we have created. It sets out what the key things are for you, as an employer, to consider when introducing a policy. It provides examples of what other companies have introduced and offers tips on how to roll out the policy to employees effectively.



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Infertility affects approximately one in six of all couples, so it's important for employers to recognise that not everyone's path to parenthood goes smoothly. As well as the potential financial drain – if you're not eligible for NHS treatment, a cycle of IVF at a private clinic can cost £5,000 or more – the effect on people's mental health can be immense. 90% of fertility patients report feelings of depression and 42% have felt suicidal which is perhaps unsurprising given the pain, anger, stress and confusion that can go hand in hand with the highs and lows of treatment. And yet many employees suffer in silence while trying to do a good job at work.

There's currently no UK law that covers fertility treatment and sadly it's not something that's openly talked about in most workplaces, but that doesn't mean there aren't lots of things you can do to support your employees, such as creating a fertility policy.

What are the key things to consider when implementing this policy?

- Make sure that the suggested information in this policy does not conflict with any information you may have in any of your other policies, e.g. time off for medical appointments, sick leave and flexible working.
- The fertility policy offers the same options to all staff regardless of tenure. Consider if you want to add any service-related eligibility for any paid leave. For example, "to be eligible for leave for fertility treatment, staff must have been continuously employed by [insert employer] for at least one year".
- When setting up this policy, we have assumed that you will want to offer above and beyond the statutory minimum. While there is currently no legal right for time off work for IVF treatment or related sickness, ACAS advises that as a minimum employers should: – Treat time off for fertility treatment in the same way as any other medical appointment. – Treat any sickness due to the side effects of IVF, in the same way as any other sick leave.
- Some of the policy wording defers to line managers to make decisions, so empower them. Educate them about health and wellbeing policies but more importantly let them know that you trust their judgement when it comes to offering individuals in their team a variety of options for support, flexibility and leave.
- A survey conducted by LinkedIn and Censuswide, showed that the vast majority (91%) of the 1,000 HR professionals polled said they would benefit from education and support to better understand employee fertility issues – consider offering high-level information around the types of treatment and what each entails.
- 47% of employees undergoing fertility challenges, investigations or treatments did not tell their manager or HR. 26% were concerned about the possible impact on their career and 19% worried their employer wouldn't understand or offer support.
- Fertility is not just an issue that affects heterosexual women. It's important to include everyone in the conversation.
- This is a very sensitive topic. While some employees may be willing to openly talk about their fertility journey, for others it's a private matter. Make sure your employees know about the policy and where to find it so they can access it confidentially.
- A significant proportion of employees who are undertaking fertility treatment will experience some form of mental illness, such as anxiety and depression. It makes sense to integrate your fertility policy with your mental health policy.
- Fertility issues may also be connected to pregnancy loss. If you have a pregnancy loss policy, it makes sense to link these.

Fertility policies from other organisations

Bristol City Council offers paid time off for fertility treatment granted to both partners (including same sex partners) to attend one programme of treatment.

ASDA allows up to three periods of paid leave for IVF, with five days for women and one day for men, along with the option of swapping shifts to fit around appointments and additional unpaid leave if necessary.

The University of Dundee allow up to five days paid leave in any academic year for investigations or treatment. A maximum of 10 days overall will be available to individual members of staff. To be eligible for leave for fertility treatment, staff must have been continuously employed by the University for at least one year.

Allen and Overy International law firm has a raft of policies and provisions to support working families. In the UK, it provides a fertility treatment leave policy which provides five days' paid leave across a 12-month rolling period for fertility treatment. It also offers enhanced adoption leave provision for both prospective parents to attend meetings and appointments in addition to eligibility for all parental leave entitlements.

Natwest Group UK banking organisation has introduced employee discounts for a multitude of fertility treatments. The business will enable its 59,000 staff to have access to IVF, sperm freezing, treatment with donor eggs and sperm, and support for same-sex couples who want to start a family at a reduced price. Discounts range from 5% to 20% depending on the treatment, with employees able to receive 10% off IVF treatment, for instance.

Centrica's British Gas, Bord Gais Energy, Centrica Business Solutions, Energy Marketing and Trading and Upstream businesses employees have access to an education programme, discounted fertility treatment such as IVF, intrauterine insemination, egg and sperm freezing, frozen embryo transfer, genetic testing, and donor eggs and/or sperm. They also offer free appointments with a dedicated fertility advisor and free home testing kits for employees and their partners in the UK.

Zurich UK insurance company offers its 4,500 UK employees an equalised approach to company enhanced maternity, adoption and paternity leave. Including:

- Up to 16 weeks' full pay for second parents after 26 weeks service – the first two weeks of leave to be taken at birth/placement for adoption, followed by the remaining 14 weeks to be taken in one block by the child's first birthday/first anniversary of adoption.
- Up to 16 weeks' full pay for birth parent and primary adoptive parents – along with the statutory right for up to 52 weeks leave.
- A new IVF policy – allowing up to 16 days' (pro-rated for part-timers) leave in a 12-month period – typically up to eight days' paid leave at key points across two cycles of IVF for the birth parent. Flexibility and support for partners is also offered through FlexWork.

Greene King, the British pub retailer and brewer launched a fertility and IVF policy covering its 40,000-strong workforce, allowing employees up to five days' additional paid leave to attend appointments for each treatment cycle, for up to three treatments.

How will a fertility policy benefit employers?

Impact on the bottom line

- Research shows that 19% of people facing infertility reduce their hours or leave employment.
- This could leave a significant skills gap in your business(xiii). The average cost to employers to replace an employee is estimated by ACAS to be more than £30,000(xv). A report from
- Deloitte and mental health charity Mind estimated that presenteeism – defined by the research as staff turning up to work despite being unwell for mental health reasons – cost UK employers between £26bn and £29bn annually through lost productivity. Fertility policies that support the health and wellbeing of those affected could reduce these figures significantly.

Becoming an employer of choice

- Policies like this help to support gender equality and enable employers to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace.
- With many people now choosing to have children later in life (and the additional issues this potentially brings – a woman’s fertility starts to decline after the age of 35; men’s fertility also decreases with age, but to a lesser extent), having family-friendly policies – such as fertility, shared parental leave, flexible working and pregnancy loss – is a great way to attract and retain experienced talent and build employee loyalty.
- Showing employees that they will be treated with respect and compassion is vital, demonstrate that there is no issue that is a taboo.
- In 2023, Conservative MP Nickie Aitken introduced a private members bill for IVF treatment to be classed alongside pregnancy-related appointments, for which women have a legal right to paid time off. While not yet legislation, forward thinking employers may want to stay ahead of the curve on this issue.

Tips on how to communicate your fertility policy

- Reduce the stigma: as a company, talk about fertility issues and actively let employees know that you’re there to support them.
- Make a conscious effort to ensure all employees know about the policy and where to find it. Find someone in the senior leadership team who is willing to be a spokesman for the policy and speak about it when appropriate both internally and externally. This will help make being open and over-coming personal challenges a sign of strength.
- Work with your internal communications team to use a variety of methods to communicate the policy.
- Combine the launch of the policy with training on how to talk about fertility issues, especially for line managers.
- Understand that many people may want to keep their fertility journey private, so make sure employees can access the policy at any time and on any device.
- If possible, create a fertility issues champion who can offer additional support to anyone on a fertility journey.
- Use national awareness events, like National Infertility Awareness Week, National Adoption Week and National Surrogacy Week as an opportunity to provide information about the subjects and communicate this to employees while also letting them know about any internal policies or support available to them.

- Make sure this and other policies supporting health, wellbeing and inclusion are included in company materials, such as your website and job advertisements.
- Encourage line managers to discuss this and other health and wellbeing policies in their regular 1-2-1s.
- Continually evaluate and refresh your policies and ensure that you continue to communicate about them at all given opportunities in the employee lifecycle: job adverts, late-stage interviews, onboarding, 1-2-1s, staff meetings, etc, so anyone who is affected knows where to turn to for help.

Tips on how to measure the impact of your fertility policy

- Survey employees regularly, for example every six months, to see if they know about the policy and understand what it contains. Make sure feedback can be given anonymously to protect people's privacy.
- Review what others are doing and update your policy if you see an appropriate initiative that would suit your employees and your organisation.
- Speak to line managers to find out about uptake of the various support on offer.
- Consider offering an opportunity for those affected by the policy to come together to talk with those responsible for creating the guidelines to really help ensure that your policy is delivering what you employees need.

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