

Paternity Leave & Shared Parental Leave: The Complete UK Guide

Know your rights, plan your time, and make the most of it

Paternity leave in the UK is changing — and not before time. Here's everything you need to know about what you're entitled to right now, what's coming, and how to use Shared Parental Leave (SPL) to get more time with your baby if the standard two weeks isn't enough.

Important: This guide covers statutory (legal minimum) rights. Your employer may offer enhanced terms — always check your employment contract or staff handbook first, as many London employers offer significantly more than the legal minimum.

Statutory Paternity Leave: The Basics

What You Get

You're entitled to either **one or two weeks** of paternity leave. If you take two weeks, you can take them together (which most people do) or in two separate one-week blocks — though both must be taken within **56 days of the baby's birth**.

What You Get Paid

Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) from 6 April 2025 is **£187.18 per week** — or 90% of your average weekly earnings if that's lower.

SPP is paid by your employer (who then reclaims most of it from HMRC), so it comes through your normal payroll. It's taxed and subject to National Insurance like regular pay.

Eligibility

To qualify for statutory paternity leave and pay, you must: - Be an **employee** (not self-employed or a worker) - Have worked for your employer for at least **26 continuous weeks** by the end of the 15th week before the baby is due - Earn at least **£125 per week** on average (the Lower Earnings Limit) - Give your employer **written notice at least 15 weeks** before the due date

Coming in April 2026: The 26-week service requirement is being scrapped. From 6 April 2026, paternity leave will be a **day-one right** — meaning you'll be entitled to it from your very first day in a new job. This is a significant change worth knowing about if you're planning a career move before starting a family.

How to Notify Your Employer

You need to give notice using [form SC3](#) or your employer's equivalent form. You'll need to state: - The baby's due date - When you want your leave to start - How long you want to take (1 or 2 weeks)

You can change the start date with 28 days' notice.

Official guidance: gov.uk/paternity-pay-leave

Shared Parental Leave (SPL): The Game-Changer

If two weeks doesn't feel like enough — and for many dads it genuinely isn't — Shared Parental Leave is the answer. It's underused (only around 2% of eligible parents take it) but it's one of the most powerful rights available to UK fathers.

How It Works

Your partner can choose to **end their maternity leave early** and share the remaining leave with you. Between you, you can share: - Up to **50 weeks** of leave - Up to **37 weeks** of Shared Parental Pay (ShPP)

All leave must be taken within the **first year** of the baby's life.

What's It Worth?

Shared Parental Pay is paid at the same rate as SPP: **£187.18 per week** (2025/26) or 90% of your average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

If your employer offers enhanced maternity pay, they may also offer enhanced SPL pay — it's worth asking HR directly. Some large London employers (particularly in finance and tech) now offer enhanced SPL pay at or near full salary.

Eligibility

You must: - Have worked for your employer for at least **26 weeks** by the end of the 15th week before the due date - Earn at least **£125 per week** on average

Your partner must: - Have been employed or self-employed for at least **26 out of the 66 weeks** before the due date - Have earned at least **£30 per week** in at least 13 of those 66 weeks

How to Take It

SPL is flexible. You can take it: - **Consecutively** — your partner takes the first six months, then you take the next six months - **Simultaneously** — both parents off at the same time (useful for the first few weeks or school holidays) - **In up to three separate blocks** — though your employer can decline discontinuous requests and offer a continuous alternative instead

The process: 1. Your partner gives notice to end their maternity leave

2. Both of you notify your respective employers of your SPL intentions at least **8 weeks before** your leave starts 3. You submit a formal booking notice

It involves more admin than standard paternity leave, but it's manageable. The best walkthrough is at [Working Families - SPL Guide](#) and the official government page: gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay

SPL in Practice: What it Actually Looks Like

Here are three common approaches London dads take:

The Handover Model Your partner takes 6 months maternity leave. She returns to work. You take the remaining 3-4 months alone with the baby. This gives the baby a parent at home for the first 9-10 months without the cost of full-time nursery.

The Overlap You both take a block of leave at the same time — perhaps weeks 3-8 after the birth, when things are genuinely hard. Then your partner continues her maternity leave and you return to work.

The Long Stretch Your partner takes the legal minimum after birth (2 weeks), and you take the majority of the 50 weeks. This is unusual in the UK but entirely legal, and some dads find it transformative.

If You're Self-Employed

Self-employed dads are not entitled to statutory paternity leave or pay. However, if you're a limited company director paying yourself via salary, you may qualify depending on how you structure your pay.

If your partner is employed, she may still qualify for maternity pay, and you could potentially take SPL if you meet the partner's eligibility criteria.

MoneyHelper - Paternity Leave for the Self-Employed

Key Dates & Deadlines Summary

Action	When
Notify employer of paternity leave	At least 15 weeks before due date
Submit SPL booking notice	At least 8 weeks before leave starts
Take paternity leave by	Within 56 days of birth
Take SPL by	Within 12 months of birth

Action	When
Day-one paternity leave right begins	April 2026

Further Reading & Support

- **GOV.UK - Paternity Pay and Leave** — definitive official guide
- **GOV.UK - Shared Parental Leave** — the full SPL rulebook
- **Acas - Paternity Rights** — plain-English explanations
- **Working Families** — excellent free advice, including a helpline: 0300 012 0312
- **MoneyHelper - Maternity and Paternity Calculator** — calculate what you're owed
- **Maternity Action** — free advice on SPL disputes and employer issues

Rates correct as of April 2025. Always verify current figures at gov.uk as they are reviewed annually.