



dti

**FATHERS-TO-BE AND
ANTENATAL APPOINTMENTS**

A Good Practice Guide



The DTI drives our ambition of 'prosperity for all' by working to create the best environment for business success in the UK. We help people and companies become more productive by promoting enterprise, innovation and creativity.

We champion UK business at home and abroad. We invest heavily in world-class science and technology. We protect the rights of working people and consumers. And we stand up for fair and open markets in the UK, Europe and the world.

The benefits of flexible working are well documented. Companies which break away from rigid work schedules report increased productivity and reduced staff turnover. This brochure puts forward the case for allowing fathers-to-be the flexibility to attend antenatal appointments.

This brochure is for: any business looking to improve the work life balance of its workforce and support fathers at an important time.

It covers: what antenatal appointments are about and why it's important for fathers to attend, and case studies from companies that have adopted a flexible approach to the issue.



INTRODUCTION

During pregnancy, although the focus is on the mother, it is important not to forget the role of the father.

An essential part of the pregnancy is antenatal care, which involves the mother being seen by a midwife at regular intervals to check that all is well with her and the baby. These meetings are a chance to ask any questions about the pregnancy or the birth and to discuss any concerns the parents might have. If the father can attend with the mother, then they will both be able to discuss any worries or find out what they need to know.

It will also help him to feel more a part of the pregnancy – fathers want to be involved with important decisions about the pregnancy, birth and baby care. Being included at this stage can lead to fathers taking a more active role after the baby is born.

This is why the Government is keen to encourage employers to let expectant fathers take time off to attend antenatal appointments without losing any pay.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Fathers do not have a legal right to time off to accompany their partners to antenatal appointments as the right to paid time off only applies to pregnant employees¹. However, a father's involvement with his child starts before the birth and many men will want to be at some of the antenatal appointments to support their partner and to find out what is happening with their baby. Many employers recognise how important a time this is and let their employees either take paid time off or make up the time later.

¹Further information about time off for antenatal care for pregnant employees can be found in the DTI booklet: Maternity Rights: A guide for employers and employees available at www.dti.gov.uk/workingparents.

ANTENATAL APPOINTMENTS

Antenatal appointments may include tests or scans. The ultrasound scan is a chance to see the baby before it is born as well as to work out the estimated date of birth and to check for problems. Many fathers want to attend the scan, as it is the first chance to see their baby. Parents can also choose to undertake a range of tests to check for the likelihood of genetic conditions and abnormalities. This can be a difficult time and most mothers will want their partner there for support.

Most antenatal appointments are held from Monday to Friday between 09.00 and 17.00, although classes like those in parentcraft are often held in the evening. There is little flexibility in when these appointments can be held, as midwives will be caring for a number of expectant women. Although the appointment may only be for a fixed amount of time, it is important to remember your employee will need time to travel to and from the appointment. There may also be waiting time.

“My wife had been feeling the effects of the pregnancy for months, but it was harder for me to really grasp the reality that a baby was on the way. Seeing the tiny heartbeat pulsing away in the middle of the screen made the pregnancy real for me, and motivated me to find out as much as I could about our developing baby, helping my partner keep healthy, and getting ready for the birth of our baby and parenthood.” – Tom

“When I was pregnant for the second time, I attended a scan at 14 weeks without my husband. At the scan I was told there was no heartbeat and the baby had died. It was the most horrific moment of my life and I needed my husband with me more than anything. I think it is essential for the father to be there, it is his baby too and important news affects him as well.” – Julie

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOUR COMPANY

It may be easier to treat each case individually rather than establishing a fixed policy. This will give you the flexibility to meet the needs of the individual employee. Not all men will want to go to the same appointments. Some may need to attend more than others if there is a problem with the pregnancy. If you cannot just give your employee the time off, consider whether he could work from home that day or make up the time over the next few days.

WHAT DO OTHER EMPLOYERS DO?

Many employers already appreciate that fathers may want to attend antenatal appointments with their partner and recognise the benefits in providing their employees with workable solutions that allow them to do so. An employee who is worrying about his partner and the baby will not be at his most productive.

Whilst some businesses do allow fathers paid time off, others make use of flexible working practices to allow fathers to take the time off and make it up at another time. The employee is happy because he can go to the appointment knowing that he won't lose out financially and the employer is happy because the work still gets done and his employee isn't sitting at work with his mind elsewhere.



“I’m lucky enough to have been able to attend all of my children’s scans and antenatal appointments as I’m self-employed. Unfortunately with our third child it was at a routine scan we found out he died at 37 weeks. I don’t think I’d have forgiven myself if I hadn’t been there for my wife. We’ve since had another baby who was 7 weeks premature and needed blood transfusions, this was also detected from antenatal scans. I’ve always put family first.” – Dunc



Advice from industry experts and a parents group on the benefits of allowing fathers-to-be the flexibility to attend antenatal appointments.

It is vital for expectant fathers to attend antenatal appointments: to see their infant on the ultrasound, support their partner if abnormalities are revealed and listen to advice from health professionals. Informed, involved fathers are good for mothers, babies – and employers: they are less likely to develop stress, and more likely to adjust well to parenthood. Among working fathers, highly involved dads actually do better at work than less involved fathers. And in dual-earner families, a key predictor of a man's ill health is worries about his relationship with his children.

FATHERS DIRECT

Many employers are keen to support both mothers and fathers to balance their work and family lives. Employers offering flexibility that meets the needs of both their business and their employees can benefit from improved recruitment and retention as well as increased productivity.

CBI

The EOC strongly supports allowing fathers to take paid time off to attend antenatal classes. Evidence suggests that fathers strongly desire to be involved from the very earliest stages before the birth of a child, and those fathers who have attended pre-natal appointments are more likely to remain continuously involved with their young child after birth. Attending antenatal classes will promote fathers' emotional bond with their baby, and enable them to support their partners by sharing problems, anxieties and concerns.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

Employers in the small business sector know that their staff want to be able to balance their work and home lives. Equally employers are aware that they benefit from such flexibility, not just in terms of better recruitment and retention but also better staff morale and performance. Such a positive approach on antenatal appointments enhances the employees' attachment to the business.

FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES



Real life examples of companies which allow fathers-to-be the flexibility to attend antenatal appointments



We don't have a formal policy on this. Best practice is to trust people to do their work, to work the hours they are paid for, not to account for every hour working, or off - but to encourage them to be responsible for their own working.

**W.L. GORE & ASSOCIATES (UK) LTD –
GORE-TEX MANUFACTURER EMPLOYING 426**

We have found that an informal flexible approach works best for us, where employees can discuss their commitments openly with their manager. This has meant that there has never been an issue raised which would lead to us implementing a formal policy.

BT – COMMUNICATIONS COMPANY EMPLOYING 108,000

The arrangements for all flexible working at MTM are relatively informal and made on an individual basis. They do all, however, meet our “Commitment to Employees” statement, which says that we will make every effort to get a best match between the needs and aspirations of our staff (regardless of position) and the needs of running an efficient customer focused organisation. At a practical level fathers-to-be would make arrangements with their immediate manager to take off time for antenatal appointments in the same way as for doctor or dentist appointments and make the time up later in the week or the following week. We do make our employees feel relaxed about such requests. The above arrangements mean that the time off is unpaid but the employee does not need to lose out financially. We have only had a few eligible employees but they have all taken up the opportunity to attend antenatal appointments with their partner at least on some occasions.

The wife of one of our employees had a really difficult pregnancy and he really appreciated the fact that he could take the time off he needed but was able to make up his time when he could. To use his words “in most companies I would have to throw a “sicky” but not here”. This is the sort of win-win solution we look for wherever possible and our staff satisfaction and retention levels reinforce our belief that we must be doing something right. We do not put a limit on the amount of time that can be taken off and rely heavily on mutual trust between employee and employer.

MTM PRODUCTS –

MANUFACTURING COMPANY IN THE WEST MIDLANDS EMPLOYING 31

We have flexible working, so people take time off for appointments (it being dentist, doctor or antenatal) as they need to, and we work around that. Employees would be paid for a reasonable amount of time off. We would base the amount of time available on the individual's case – if, for example, the mother was sick or had problems, of course we'd be more flexible about the time needed off. This is left to the discretion of management, yes – we really do think it is good policy to be flexible when it comes to matters that affect people's lives as much such as pregnancy and children in general.

Always treat each individual as an individual and be flexible where you can – it makes people feel valued and appreciated.

INNOCENT – MANUFACTURING COMPANY IN SOUTH EAST EMPLOYING 27

We believe flexibility is a two way street



Microsoft empowers its employees to work in ways that suit their individual lifestyles best – this applies to employees at all times, and for all circumstances. So staff are able to manage their workload to fit their own needs. The company’s flexible working policies encourage employees to create their own working patterns, and employees at Microsoft are therefore evaluated on their work, rather than time spent at their desk.

Microsoft’s flexible working policy means that staff are free to work around appointments without having to go through a formal request process to be absent from the office. This policy is communicated to all throughout the organisation, and most of the staff at Microsoft work flexibly in one form or another.

MICROSOFT – IT COMPANY EMPLOYING 1,637

Asda offers paid time off for fathers to accompany their partners to antenatal appointments if the employee cannot attend outside of working hours. Employees must give as much notice as possible to minimise disruption and show the appointment card for the first visit. Although there is no limit to the number of appointments an employee can attend, it is expected that the time off taken per visit should not exceed four hours. Asda publicises this entitlement as part of its benefits package.

“We believe it is important to support colleagues in balancing their work and domestic commitments. We believe flexibility is a two way street, and when colleagues feel they have options available to help them meet their personal needs then they take less short term absence and are also more willing to offer reciprocal flexibility within their teams.”

ASDA – RETAILER EMPLOYING 127, 513



Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to give my employee paid time off to attend antenatal appointments?

No, there is not a legal requirement to do so. However, best practice suggests that many companies do allow employees to take either paid time off or make up the time later.

Why can't he go out of work hours?

Most antenatal appointments are held from Monday to Friday between 09.00 and 17.00, although classes like those in parentcraft are often held in the evening. There is little flexibility in when these appointments can be held as midwives will be caring for a number of expectant women.

How long do the appointments take?

This will depend on the type of appointment. The midwife should be able to supply this information. Although the appointment may only be for a fixed amount of time, it is important to remember your employee will need time to travel to and from the appointment. There may also be waiting time.

How many appointments should I let him attend?

This is a matter of choice for individual companies. At the first appointment the midwife will want to gather a lot of information including details of the father's family history. Additionally most fathers will want to attend the scan to see their baby for the first time.

Should I ask for proof of appointments?

This is up to you. Even for mothers who are allowed by law to take paid time off, this is optional.

What do other small firms do in this situation?

Many small firms have flexible working patterns in place, which allow the father to make up the time later.

For more information on flexible working and how it can benefit your business the DTI has published a booklet entitled: Flexible working in practice. This can be downloaded from **www.dti.gov.uk/bestpractice/people/flexible-working.htm**

GENERAL BUSINESS ADVICE

You can also get a range of general business advice from the following organisations:

England

- Call Business Link on 0845 600 9 006
- Visit the website at www.businesslink.gov.uk

Scotland

- Call Business Gateway on 0845 609 6611
- Visit the website at www.bgateway.com

Wales

- Call Business Eye/Llygad Busnes on 08457 96 97 98
- Visit the website at www.busesseye.org.uk

Northern Ireland

- Call Invest Northern Ireland on 028 9023 9090
- Visit the website at www.investni.com

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