Pregnancy in the workplace

Introduction

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) recently completed a major investigation into the treatment of pregnant women at work. One of the key findings was the lack of awareness among managers about maternity rights legislation.

After working closely with an advisory board that included employers’ representatives and government departments, the EOC developed the Toolkit for employers: Managing employees who are pregnant or new parents to help employers manage pregnancy at work. This comprehensive web-based tool can be accessed on the EOC website at www.eoc.org.uk/pregnancy

In conjunction with this, the Department of Trade and Industry has produced written statements to ensure that pregnant women are aware of their rights and employers are aware of what they need to do and where to get advice.

About the toolkit

The toolkit will assist employers with managing pregnant employees and new parents more effectively. It provides summaries of the law on key topics, links to more detailed information on legal obligations, example letters, templates and links to online calculators. It also provides real life examples of businesses who have dealt with issues around pregnancy and new parents in the workplace.

The toolkit covers the following topics in detail:

- **planning for maternity and adoption leave** – preparing and planning for the impact of an employee becoming pregnant and going on maternity leave
- **arranging cover for maternity leave** – options for organising cover
- **ensuring the health and safety of expectant and new mothers** – carrying out risk assessments on pregnant women and new mothers to ensure that neither are exposed to risk that could damage either their health or safety
- **providing time off for antenatal care** – the procedures to follow in order to provide paid time off for all pregnant employees to attend antenatal classes
- **managing sickness before, after and during maternity leave** – sickness and pregnancy-related sickness management
- **managing performance during pregnancy** – the correct procedures to follow
• providing maternity leave and pay – employees’ entitlements to maternity leave and pay and organisations’ entitlements to claim back statutory maternity pay from HM Revenue and Customs

• managing the return from maternity leave – the rights of new mothers to return to work and how organisations can take a pro-active approach to dealing with this

• managing requests for flexible working – options for employers

• providing parental leave and time off for dependants – dealing with employees who require time off to care for a child or who need to deal with an emergency

• providing adoption leave and pay – one member of a couple is entitled to leave and this outlines the process that needs to be followed

• providing for same sex partnerships – the process to follow when dealing with same sex partners who are entitled by law to the same legal rights as all parents

• providing for disabled employees – dealing with pregnancy and new parenthood for disabled employees

• allowing for fertility treatment – although there is no specific legal right for an employee to take time off work for fertility treatment, this section outlines what an organisation can do.

More information

Equal Opportunities Commission website – www.eoc.org.uk

Guidance is available from the Department of Trade and Industry website at www.dti.gov.uk/employment/workandfamilies