Fact Sheet #28: The Family and Medical Leave Act

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) entitles eligible employees of covered employers to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons. This fact sheet provides general information about which employers are covered by the FMLA, when employees are eligible and entitled to take FMLA leave, and what rules apply when employees take FMLA leave.

COVERED EMPLOYERS

The FMLA only applies to employers that meet certain criteria. A **covered employer** is a:

- Private-sector employer, with 50 or more employees in 20 or more workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year, including a joint employer or successor in interest to a covered employer;
- Public agency, including a local, state, or Federal government agency, regardless of the number of employees it employs; or
- Public or private elementary or secondary school, regardless of the number of employees it employs.

ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES

Only eligible employees are entitled to take FMLA leave. An **eligible employee** is one who:

- Works for a *covered employer*;
- Has worked for the employer for at least *12 months*;
- Has at least *1,250 hours* of service for the employer during the 12 month period immediately preceding the leave*; and
- Works at a location where the employer has at least *50 employees within 75 miles*.

* Special hours of service eligibility requirements apply to airline flight crew employees. *See* Fact Sheet 28J: Special Rules for Airline Flight Crew Employees under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

The 12 months of employment do not have to be consecutive. That means any time previously worked for the same employer (including seasonal work) could, in most cases, be used to meet the 12-month requirement. If the employee has a break in service that lasted seven years or more, the time worked prior to the break will not count *unless* the break is due to service covered by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), or there is a written agreement, including a collective bargaining agreement, outlining the employer's intention to rehire the employee after the break in service. *See* "FMLA Special Rules for Returning Reservists".

LEAVE ENTITLEMENT

Eligible employees may take up to **12 workweeks** of leave in a 12-month period for one or more of the following reasons:

- The birth of a son or daughter or placement of a son or daughter with the employee for adoption or foster care;
- To care for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent who has a serious health condition;
- For a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her job; or
- For any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that a spouse, son, daughter, or parent is a military member on covered active duty or call to covered active duty status.

An eligible employee may also take up to **26 workweeks** of leave during a "single 12-month period" to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness, when the employee is the spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin of the servicemember. The "single 12-month period" for military caregiver leave is different from the 12-month period used for other FMLA leave reasons. *See* Fact Sheets 28F: Qualifying Reasons under the FMLA and 28M: The Military Family Leave Provisions under the FMLA.

Under some circumstances, employees may take FMLA leave on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis. That means an employee may take leave in separate blocks of time or by reducing the time he or she works each day or week for a single qualifying reason. When leave is needed for planned medical treatment, the employee must make a reasonable effort to schedule treatment so as not to unduly disrupt the employer's operations. If FMLA leave is for the birth, adoption, or foster placement of a child, use of intermittent or reduced schedule leave requires the employer’s approval.

Under certain conditions, employees may choose, or employers may require employees, to "substitute" (run concurrently) accrued paid leave, such as sick or vacation leave, to cover some or all of the FMLA leave period. An employee’s ability to substitute accrued paid leave is determined by the terms and conditions of the employer's normal leave policy.

NOTICE

Employees must comply with their employer’s usual and customary requirements for requesting leave and provide enough information for their employer to reasonably determine whether the FMLA may apply to the leave request. Employees generally must request leave 30 days in advance when the need for leave is foreseeable. When the need for leave is foreseeable less than 30 days in advance or is unforeseeable, employees must provide notice as soon as possible and practicable under the circumstances.

When an employee seeks leave for a FMLA-qualifying reason for the first time, the employee need not expressly assert FMLA rights or even mention the FMLA. If an employee later requests additional leave for the same qualifying condition, the employee must specifically reference either the qualifying reason for leave or the need for FMLA leave. *See* Fact Sheet 28E: Employee Notice Requirements under the FMLA .

Covered employers must:

(1) Post a notice explaining rights and responsibilities under the FMLA (and may be subject to a civil money penalty of up to $110 for willful failure to post);

(2) Include information about the FMLA in their employee handbooks or provide information to new employees upon hire;

(3) When an employee requests FMLA leave or the employer acquires knowledge that leave may be for a FMLA-qualifying reason, provide the employee with notice concerning his or her eligibility for FMLA leave and his or her rights and responsibilities under the FMLA; and

(4) Notify employees whether leave is designated as FMLA leave and the amount of leave that will be deducted from the employee's FMLA entitlement.

See Fact Sheet 28D: Employer Notice Requirements under the FMLA.

CERTIFICATION

When an employee requests FMLA leave due to his or her own serious health condition or a covered family member's serious health condition, the employer may require certification in support of the leave from a health care provider. An employer may also require second or third medical opinions (at the employer's expense) and periodic recertification of a serious health condition. *See* Fact Sheet 28G: Certification of a Serious Health Condition under the FMLA. For information on certification requirements for military family leave, *See* Fact Sheet 28M(c): Qualifying Exigency Leave under the FMLA; Fact Sheet 28M(a): Military Caregiver Leave for a Current Servicemember under the FMLA; and Fact Sheet 28M(b): Military Caregiver Leave for a Veteran under the FMLA.

JOB RESTORATION AND HEALTH BENEFITS

Upon return from FMLA leave, an employee must be restored to his or her original job or to an equivalent job with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment. An employee's use of FMLA leave cannot be counted against the employee under a "no-fault" attendance policy. Employers are also required to continue group health insurance coverage for an employee on FMLA leave under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. *See* Fact Sheet 28A: Employee Protections under the Family and Medical Leave Act .

OTHER PROVISIONS

Special rules apply to employees of local education agencies. Generally, these rules apply to intermittent or reduced schedule FMLA leave or the taking of FMLA leave near the end of a school term.

Salaried executive, administrative, and professional employees of covered employers who meet the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) criteria for exemption from minimum wage and overtime under the FLSA regulations, 29 CFR Part 541, do not lose their FLSA-exempt status by using any unpaid FMLA leave. This special exception to the "salary basis" requirements for FLSA's exemption extends only to an eligible employee's use of FMLA leave.

ENFORCEMENT

It is unlawful for any employer to interfere with, restrain, or deny the exercise of or the attempt to exercise any right provided by the FMLA. It is also unlawful for an employer to discharge or discriminate against any individual for opposing any practice, or because of involvement in any

proceeding, related to the FMLA. *See* Fact Sheet 77B: Protections for Individuals under the FMLA . The Wage and Hour Division is responsible for administering and enforcing the FMLA for most employees. Most federal and certain congressional employees are also covered by the law but are subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management or Congress. If you believe that your rights under the FMLA have been violated, you may file a complaint with the Wage and Hour Division or file a private lawsuit against your employer in court.

For additional information, visit our Wage and Hour Division Website: http://www.wagehour.dol.gov and/or call our toll-free information and helpline, available 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in your time zone, 1-866-4-USWAGE (1-866-487-9243).

This publication is for general information and is not to be considered in the same light as official statements of position contained in the regulations.

U.S. Department of Labor
Frances Perkins Building
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

1-866-4-USWAGE
TTY: 1-866-487-9243
Contact Us