

8 in 10 civil servants take paternity leave

Singapore's Ministry of Manpower has no plans to expand the current paternity policy

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Human Resources Director, 29 February 2020

Over eight in 10 (84%) eligible fathers working in Singapore's public sector take paternity leave, said Manpower Minister Josephine Teo.

This is higher than overall national figures from the Ministry of Social and Family Development: in 2019, only about 45% of fathers took paternity leave.

During the parliamentary session, Minister Teo said that there are currently no plans to extend the period where fathers can take the mandatory two weeks. Currently, eligible employees must use up the leave within 12 months of childbirth – this is the same for both paternity and maternity entitlements.

She explained the timeframe was meant to support parents caring for their infants when they're younger and in need of care the most.

The minister was responding to member of parliament (MP) Louis Ng, who asked whether the period of utilisation can be extended to 24 months, reported The Straits Times.

She added that after the 12 months, employees are eligible for six days of paid infant care leave each year until their child is seven years old. Working parents are also entitled to six additional days of unpaid infant care leave each year until the child is two.

For employees with infants who need more care, such as medical conditions, the ministry encourages employers to practise discretion and offer up to four weeks of unpaid leave.

Paternity leave take-up rate 'not ideal'

Earlier this year, a study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) found that some working fathers feel that two weeks of paternity leave is not enough time to contribute significantly to childcare. One respondent even noted that two weeks is "just a vacation".

The study suggested that stigma remained a cause for the low take-up rate in Singapore. Being a father and caregiver may still be viewed as "emasculating" to some, and government policy support and communications could be helpful in encouraging use of paternity leave.

Besides the mandatory two weeks, working fathers are entitled to apply and share up to four weeks of their wife's 16 weeks of paid maternity leave. However, an overwhelming 97% of Singaporeans did not take up the shared parental leave.