

**University College Cork**

**Pregnancy Loss Support Policy (for pregnancy loss under 23 weeks)**

## **1. Introduction**

At University College Cork, we recognise the importance of supporting the health of all our employees and compassion is one of our key university values. The experience of pregnancy loss is unique to each individual, whether it is felt physically, emotionally, or both. With this in mind, our policy is designed to provide a supportive framework and a compassionate and flexible environment that encourages open dialogue and enables University employees to feel comfortable sharing their experiences, should they wish to do so, and accessing the support they need.

As part of UCC’s commitment to valuing and supporting employees, the University has a suite of employee support polices available: [Work Life Balance Policies | University College Cork](https://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/policies/work-life-balance/) . The Pregnancy Loss Support Policy is one such policy.

Pregnancy loss affects approximately one in every four pregnancies, most often before 12 weeks of pregnancy. Pregnancy loss at any gestation can have physical impacts on the pregnant woman, and emotional and social impacts on the woman and her partner. Most people of reproductive age are in paid employment; as such, workplaces are an important context to consider in pregnancy loss experiences.

Statutory rights and entitlements to leave and pay after the loss of a pregnancy are different depending on when the loss occurs. If the pregnancy loss occurs ~~is~~ after 23 weeks +0 days of pregnancy, full statutory maternity/paternity leave rights and entitlements apply.

For pregnancy losses that occur under 23 weeks +0 days of pregnancy, there is currently no statutory entitlement to specific leave for pregnancy loss. UCC has created this policy to address this need. Statutory paid sick leave has been, and remains, available.

This policy aims to provide University College Cork employees with the time, resources and support they need following a pregnancy loss. It outlines the entitlements, procedures, and support mechanisms in place to assist individuals who are affected by pregnancy loss, including partners.

## **2. Scope**

This policy applies to all employees who physically experience a pregnancy loss, at any time before 23 weeks +0 days. It is inclusive of all employees, regardless of gender, type of contract of employment or length of service, role or base/location.

It includes miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy, and termination of pregnancy for any reason.

Separate guidance for managers on supporting people who experience pregnancy loss in the workplace or academic environment is provided in the Pregnancy Loss Support Policy Manager Toolkit (available to Managers: traininganddevelopment@ucc.ie)

While this policy addresses pregnancy loss under 23 weeks +0 days, many of the supports (beyond leave) are relevant to employees who experience later losses.

**Who is this policy for?**

This policy is for:

* Employees (regardless of contractual status) who physically experience a pregnancy loss under 23 weeks +0 days of pregnancy
* Employees whose partner physically experiences a pregnancy loss under 23 weeks +0 days of pregnancy
* Line managers of employees who are experiencing or have experienced pregnancy loss under 23 weeks +0 days of pregnancy
* HR Business managers and staff
* Colleagues who wish to support fellow employees through pregnancy loss.

## **3. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear framework for staff members affected by pregnancy loss within the University community. This policy ensures that affected faculty and staff have access to appropriate entitlements, accommodations, and support services. Additionally, it aims to provide guidance for University managers on how to handle requests related to pregnancy loss with sensitivity and in a manner that supports the staff member’s needs. The policy also highlights available resources and support for people who have experienced pregnancy loss.

## 4. Principles

This policy is underpinned by the following principles:

* The University is committed to supporting all employees who experience a pregnancy loss, whether it happens directly to them or their partner, regardless of the nature of their loss, their gender/sexual identity or orientation or their length of service.
* This policy recognises that, for many, pregnancy loss is a bereavement.
* This policy also makes no assumptions about how employees experiencing a pregnancy loss feel, or how they want to be treated. The University acknowledges that every employee’s experience of pregnancy loss will be different. It instead aims to outline the support that is available, and advice that may be useful, should an employee need it.
* Leave requests will be considered fairly, promptly and in a sensitive manner. Mutual trust, respect, confidentiality and discretion with due regard for employees’ circumstances inform these actions.
* Every effort will be made to facilitate leave requests, subject to reasonable notice with due consideration for the particular situation, noting that this may not be possible in an emergency situation of pregnancy loss.
* The principle of equality shall be applied in the interpretation of this policy in keeping with our University’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

## **6. Pregnancy Loss: Definitions**

Pregnancy loss can be experienced in many ways, and no two people’s experiences will be the same. Pregnancy loss might also be experienced differently for the same person at different times, and it is important to take the lead from the employee on how they experience it (e.g. whether as a loss and/or a bereavement), and the language used to refer to the pregnancy loss (e.g. baby, fetus, pregnancy). It is important to understand the different forms of pregnancy loss and their definitions, as outlined in the [PLACES | Pregnancy Loss (under 24 weeks) in Workplaces: Informing policymakers on support mechanisms](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0e7d5-places-pregnancy-loss-under-24-weeks-in-workplaces-informing-policymakers-on-support-mechanisms/) report:

* **First trimester miscarriage:**  The spontaneous loss of a pregnancy within the first 12 completed weeks of pregnancy.
* **Second trimester miscarriage:** The spontaneous loss of a pregnancy after the 12th completed week and before 23 weeks of pregnancy.
* **Recurrent miscarriage:** Two or more consecutive first trimester miscarriages.
* **Ectopic pregnancy:** When a fertilised egg implants itself outside of the uterus (womb).
* **Molar pregnancy:** Occurs at the time of conception when the sperm and the egg join together and there is excessive development of the cells that form the placenta with little or no fetal (baby) development.
* **Termination of pregnancy:** A medical procedure which is intended to end the life of a fetus[[1]](#footnote-2).
* **Stillbirth:** An infant born after 23 weeks of pregnancy, or with a birthweight of over 400g, with no signs of life[[2]](#footnote-3).
* **Neonatal death:** Early neonatal death is the death of a live born baby occurring within seven completed days of birth, with birth occurring at any number of weeks of pregnancy. Late neonatal death is the death of a live born baby occurring after the 7th day and within 28 days of birth. Early neonatal death can occur before 23 weeks of pregnancy. Any baby born with signs of life is termed and registered as a live birth. Birth weight and gestational age are only considered for stillbirth.

## **7. Entitlements for Employees who Physically Experience Pregnancy Loss before 23 weeks +0days**

The University recognises the distress, both physical and emotional, that may result from pregnancy loss and the impact this may have on individual employees, regardless of when or how the loss occurs. This policy has been prepared to provide paid time off and support in relation to pregnancy loss that occurs under 23 weeks +0 days of pregnancy. However, it is acknowledged that no two situations will be the same, and that individuals will have different needs, with some people preferring to rest and recuperate without any distraction, while for others being able to continue with their day-to-day activities, while being supported, is their preference. Employees are therefore encouraged to discuss with their line manager or a member of the People and Culture team what support they may need which may include a combination of available supports.

The University provides the following entitlements to staff who experience physically pregnancy loss under 23 weeks +0days:

* Up to 10 paid pregnancy loss leave days in a twelve-month period (see below); and/or

* Working from home for an agreed period; and/or

* Having shorter working days or flexible start and end times for an agreed period of time to facilitate time off for appointments and/or rest; and/or

* Availing of additional types of leave if required.

**Paid Pregnancy Loss Leave Days:** The University wants to support employees during this time and we recognise that facilitating fully paid leave from work is the most important way we can help. This policy provides for separate entitlement to leave, separate from sick leave or other applicable forms of leave.

Under this policy the person who physically experiences the pregnancy loss is entitled to up to 10 paid pregnancy loss leave days in a 12-month period. The 10 days entitlement can be taken together, or separately over the 12-month period.

There is no requirement for an employee to avail of the full allocation of leave. In some cases, an employee may wish to return to work sooner, or take no leave at all. This can be discussed with the employee’s line manager.

It is recognised that it will not always be possible to request pregnancy loss leave in advance. However, an employee (or their partner/next of kin/someone nominated to speak on their behalf) is encouraged to speak with their line manager or a member of the People and Culture Department as soon as possible if they are considering taking pregnancy loss leave in accordance with this policy.

NB: Employees who experience later losses (after 23 weeks) are entitled to full maternity/paternity rights, leave and pay. Please complete the Pregnancy Loss Support Policy Leave form here: [https://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/policies/leave/pregnancy-loss](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ucc.ie%2Fen%2Fhr%2Fpolicies%2Fleave%2Fpregnancy-loss&data=05%7C02%7CAHutch%40ucc.ie%7Cf269779f37944b36e05a08de064c2494%7C46fe5ca5866f4e4292e9ed8786245545%7C0%7C0%7C638955121249897740%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=rn%2BVsWNeM6YfXpskP9%2Boouo2kg4A%2B5KycS6LPuXEqx0%3D&reserved=0)

Additional Leave:

Emotional and physical recovery from a pregnancy loss does not follow a set timeframe and every situation is different. It is acknowledged that an employee may therefore require an additional period of absence from work, beyond the initial period of paid leave. This additional absence could be facilitated by the Flexible Working Policy, Bereavement Leave Policy, UCC Sick Leave Policy or by taking unpaid leave, depending on the circumstances.

**7. Pregnancy Loss at Work**

If a pregnancy loss begins (or happens) while at work, employees are encouraged to speak with their line manager or a trusted colleague. They can then arrange for the employee’s preferred contact to be notified and find a suitable place for them to remain while any medical care is organised, or arrangements are made for them to travel home or to travel for medical care.

The University recognises how physically and/or emotionally difficult the experience may be. We want to ensure that no employee feels that they have to go through the experience alone or continue working through it. The employee’s line manager, or a trusted colleague, should work with them to agree on how, and if, their absence will be communicated to others. They should be assured of confidentiality or principles of same when they do so. Employees who are partners of a person experiencing a pregnancy loss will be allowed to leave work at short notice to provide support.

**8.Accommodations**

We recognise that returning to work after pregnancy loss may be challenging and that the needs of each employee during this period may vary. With this in mind, we encourage employees to speak with their line manager or the People and Culture Department about how they can support them on return to work. If an employee has any suggestions for any accommodations or adjustments that may help ease their transition back to work, they should discuss these with their line manager.

Line managers should offer, and employees can request, accommodations (over an agreed period of time) such as:

* + Phased return to work
  + Modified / flexible working hours
  + Remote work options, or change of working area
  + Lighter or modified duties, or
  + A temporary change to current role and responsibilities.

These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and decisions will be made with full consideration of the staff member’s well-being and their professional responsibilities.

**9. Support for Partners**

The University provides support to partners of those who have a pregnancy loss. This includes access to counselling services and flexible leave options for employees who may need time off to care for their own well-being or to provide support to their partners.

## **10. Procedures**

1. **Requesting Leave or Support:**
   * **For Employees:** Employees should notify their manager of their need for leave or accommodations following pregnancy loss. A formal request should be submitted with supporting documentation (e.g., medical certificate) where necessary. The People and Culture Department will guide the employee through the process and help determine their entitlements.
2. **Accessing Counselling and Emotional Support:**
   * **For Employees who experience a pregnancy loss:** Employees can access the university’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential counselling services and emotional support. The People and Culture department can provide information on available services, both internal and external, for staff members affected by pregnancy loss.
   * **For Partners:** Staff members whose partners have physically experienced pregnancy loss may also access counselling services, either through the University’s EAP or external providers, for support during this time.

**11.Toolkit for Managers**

The University provides a comprehensive toolkit for managers to help them respond effectively and sensitively to employees affected by pregnancy loss. This toolkit includes:

* + **Guidance on Handling Sensitive Conversations:** Best practices for discussing pregnancy loss with employees.
  + **Accommodations and Leave Guidelines:** Information on how to assess and implement appropriate accommodations and leave entitlements.
  + **Support for Partners:** Guidelines on how managers can support colleagues who are partners of those who have a pregnancy loss.
  + **Communication and Confidentiality:** Guidance on maintaining privacy and confidentiality throughout the process.

**12.Maintaining Confidentiality**

The University is committed to protecting the privacy of all staff members affected by pregnancy loss. Personal and medical information will be kept confidential and shared only on a need-to-know basis, in compliance with data protection regulations (e.g., GDPR).

**13. Returning to Work**

Employees returning from leave will work with their manager and People and Culture to determine any necessary adjustments to workload or schedule, ensuring a smooth transition back to work.

## **14. Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually by the University’s People and Culture Department In partnership with the EDI Unit, the Pregnancy Loss Research Group and relevant stakeholders. The University will seek feedback from staff on their experiences with the policy, and any necessary changes or updates will be made to improve the support provided. The University is committed to continuous improvement and ensuring the policy remains responsive to the needs of the community.

## **15. Resources**

* Kelly-Harrington R, Hennessy M, Leitao S, Donnelly M, Murray C, O’Sullivan M, Dalton-O’Connor C, Nuzum D, O’Donoghue K. [PLACES | Pregnancy Loss (under 24 weeks) in Workplaces: Informing policymakers on support mechanisms](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0e7d5-places-pregnancy-loss-under-24-weeks-in-workplaces-informing-policymakers-on-support-mechanisms/). Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; 2024.
* Citizen’s Information, [Bereavement and childbirth](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth-family-relationships/miscarriage-and-stillbirth/bereavement-and-childbirth/)
* Pregnancy and Infant Loss Ireland: [www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie](http://www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie)
* Miscarriage Association of Ireland: [www.miscarriage.ie](http://www.miscarriage.ie)
* Féileacáin: [www.feileacain.ie](http://www.feileacain.ie)
* The Sexual Health Centre, Cork: [www.sexualhealthcentre.com](https://www.sexualhealthcentre.com/)
* Cork Miscarriage Website: [www.corkmiscarriage.com](http://www.corkmiscarriage.com)
* Pregnancy Loss Research Group: [www.ucc.ie/pregnancyloss](http://www.ucc.ie/pregnancyloss)

**Notes**

The University Sick Leave policy is available on <https://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/policies/leave/sick/> while the statutory entitlement to leave following a stillbirth (after 23 weeks of pregnancy) is 26 weeks maternity leave <https://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/policies/leave/maternity/>

We use terms such as ‘pregnancy loss’, ‘miscarriage’, ‘termination of pregnancy’ and ‘fetus’; however, we recognise that people have different views and preferences on the appropriateness and use of such terminology, particularly when applying it across different types of pregnancy endings and pregnancy loss experiences.

**Version Tracker**

Approved by UCC Governing Authority on 9 September 2025.

1. Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Civil Registration (Electronic Registration) Act 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)