



**Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta, Acmhainní Daonna**

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhísí Sláinte

Ospidéal Dr. Steevens'

Baile Átha Cliath 8

**Office of the National Director of Human Resources**

Health Service Executive

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**To:** Chief Executive Officer  
Each National Director  
Each Assistant National Director HR  
Each Assistant Chief Finance Officer  
Each Hospital Group CEO  
Each Hospital Group Director of HR  
Each CEO Section 38 Agencies  
Each HR Manager Section 38 Agencies  
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Each Employee Relations Manager  
Each Group Director of Nursing & Midwifery  
Each Group Director of Midwifery  
Each Clinical Director  
Director National Ambulance Service

**From:** Anne Marie Hoey, National Director of Human Resources

**Date:** 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021

**Subject:** HR Circular 006/2021: Breastfeeding Policy for Staff Working in the Public Health Service

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Dear Colleagues

Please find attached the Breastfeeding Policy for Staff Working in the Public Health Service. <https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/breastfeeding-policy-for-public-health-service-employees.pdf>

In line with Government and HSE Policy on Infant Feeding and supporting more mothers to breastfeed and to breastfeed for longer, the Policy was approved by the HSE's Executive Management Team and will come into operation from **2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021**.

The Policy applies to all employees in the HSE and Section 38 hospitals and agencies who are breastfeeding and/ providing breast milk for up to 2 years from the date of birth of the child. The new maximum age limit goes beyond the current statutory entitlement

of six months and is a significant measure in supporting health service employees to breastfeed following their return to work from maternity leave. The provisions of the Policy are designed to promote a workplace culture that facilitates employees who are breastfeeding whilst recognising service demands and resource constraints.

Under the Policy, staff will be entitled to time off without loss of pay for breastfeeding breaks at work for up to one hour per normal working day. Staff who are working reduced hours or work longer days can take the breaks on a pro rata basis

Breastfeeding breaks may be taken in the form of one break of 60 minutes, two breaks of 30 minutes each, or three breaks of 20 minutes each, or, in such other manner as agreed by the employee and her manager.

If no breastfeeding facilities exist in the workplace, the employee may reduce her working day by one hour without loss of pay, in accordance with service need, in a manner to be agreed between the employee and her manager. In accordance with the Policy, employees should be provided with a designated space where possible for the purposes of breast milk expression. Managers are required to engage with employees in relation to these arrangements, and managers should endeavour to facilitate employees' needs as far as reasonably practicable having regard to service requirements.

The Policy states that designated space for the purposes of breast milk expression may be multi- purpose, provided that alternative space is readily available if that space is in use, e.g. office, consultation room, treatment room, meeting room or staff room spaces. The location may be the place an employee normally works, provided there is adequate privacy, cleanliness, and it is comfortable for the employee. Toilet facilities are not appropriate for women to breastfeed or to express their breast milk.

### **Process for applying and reviewing breastfeeding breaks**

Employees who wish to avail of breastfeeding breaks/breastfeeding supports must:

- Apply to their line manager in writing as soon as possible but no later than four weeks prior to the employee's return to the workplace. For employees who have already returned to the workplace on the date of implementation of this policy, managers should aim to facilitate the request for breastfeeding breaks no later than within four weeks from the date of application or sooner if possible.
- A sample application form is set out at Appendix 3 of the Policy. HSE employees should apply using HR 117 breastfeeding breaks application form. Employees will need to furnish their child's birth certificate to confirm their date of birth only. The birth certificate should be returned to the employee and not retained on file.
- Line managers should review arrangements with relevant employees after the first month and at three monthly intervals thereafter, or, more frequently, as the employees' breastfeeding needs change.

Managers in the health service have an important role in the implementation of this Policy and in creating a workplace culture which supports employees who wish to breastfeed at work. The Policy also emphasises managers' responsibilities to keep records, including the start and end date of employees availing of the breastfeeding supports to support monitoring and evaluation of the Policy within the public health service.

### **Monitoring of leave taken**

- HR Processes should be established to record the numbers of staff availing of the breastfeeding breaks Policy. Managers should send the completed application forms to their usual processing units (e.g. local HR/ER departments, or National Personnel Records). In SAP areas, Monitoring of Tasks will be used to record and report on the number of staff availing of the breastfeeding breaks Policy.
- The application form seeks the employee's consent to be contacted by the HSE National Breastfeeding Implementation Group to feedback their experience of breastfeeding breaks at work.

Please ensure that this circular and Policy is brought to the attention of all relevant managers in your area of responsibility and that they are aware of their obligations to communicate the introduction of this Policy within their teams.

### **Queries**

Queries from individual employees or managers in relation to the Policy and implementation of arrangements to facilitate breastfeeding in the workplace must be referred to local HR/Employee Relations Departments. The National HR Help Desk is also available to take queries on 1850 444 925 or [ask.hr@hse.ie](mailto:ask.hr@hse.ie). In addition, the HSE National Breastfeeding Coordinator Laura McHugh can provide assistance to employees and managers with the implementation of arrangements under the Policy ([laura.mchugh@hse.ie](mailto:laura.mchugh@hse.ie))

Queries from HR Departments in relation to the contents of this circular may be referred to Mary Ruane, HSE Corporate Employee Relations, 63-64 Adelaide Road, Dublin 2. Telephone: 01 6626966. Email: [mary.ruane@hse.ie](mailto:mary.ruane@hse.ie)

Yours sincerely



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**Anne Marie Hoey**  
**National Director of Human Resources**



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