

# Co-op to give all staff paid leave for fertility treatments

Co-op employees will be able to take paid time off for fertility treatments after the retailer launched a new policy.

Chief executive Shirine Khoury-Haq said she wants to create a supportive environment for her staff after going through the process of fertility treatment herself.

The policy will provide paid leave for staff to attend medical appointments while undergoing fertility treatment, including people using a surrogate.

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The time off is flexible and unrestricted as it cannot assume to know what people will need, Co-op said.

The measures also extend to partners wanting to accompany those going to appointments for fertility treatment, with paid leave for up to 10 appointments per cycle and for up to three cycles of fertility treatment.

Co-op, which employs about 60,000 people, said that anyone can access the paid support and it does not matter how long they have worked at Co-op or how many hours they work, the PA news agency said.

It follows a number of large UK companies, like NatWest and Centrica, launching similar fertility policies last year.

NatWest introduced employee discounts for treatments including IVF and sperm freezing, while Centrica partnered with a reproductive healthcare benefits provider.

There is currently no legal right for employees to take paid leave for fertility treatment in the same way that there is for antenatal appointments, such as scans and health checks.

But employers should treat IVF appointments and any sickness the same as any other medical appointment or sickness, according to Acas.

The launch has been met with support from charities Fertility Matters at Work and Surrogacy UK who argue that there is a need for more inclusive and supportive professional environments.

Ms Khoury-Haq said: "It is incredibly difficult to navigate through fertility treatment while balancing work and the wider impact it has on your life.

"Sadly, in some cases, there is also the need to manage the physical and emotional impact of failed cycles and even pregnancy loss.

"The decision to discuss this with your employer is an incredibly difficult and personal one. However, by creating a supportive environment companies can go a long way in opening the conversation with colleagues and easing the stress that people in this situation often feel.

"Having gone through all of this myself, I felt very lucky to be in a supportive professional environment; however, this isn't always the case for so many people.

"I feel very proud that the Co-op is leading the way on launching a fertility policy and supporting our colleagues at a time when they need it most."

Co-op has an existing policy that means employees affected by pregnancy loss are eligible for full paid leave if they cannot access either maternity or parental bereavement leave.

Caroline Nokes MP, chair of the Women and Equalities Select

Committee, added: “I really welcome the Co-op’s leading response to fertility support for employees.

“We all recognise the pressures placed on families and individuals going through fertility treatment, and time off to support partners is such an important step forward.

“But crucially we still talk too little about these sorts of issues and I hope the Co-op is also able to create the inclusive and supportive environment that is so desperately needed.”

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