



Unified Insurance Program

Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave Q&A

The Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave Program (PFML) covers two types of leaves: **Family Leave** (your family member's serious health condition or to bond with a child) and **Medical Leave** (your own serious health condition).

Medical Leave

Effective July 1, 2020 the PUD's Short Term Disability program was revised to comply with the medical leave component of the PFML. When you need time off because of your own serious health condition, you will be covered and paid through the PUD's Short Term Disability program (not the state's PFML program).

Family Leave

You may apply for paid family leave when you need to care for a family member, to bond with a new child, or for certain military-events. The benefits provided under PFML are separate from employer and federal benefits for the same types of leaves.

This Q&A focuses on family leave and contains questions and answers that may help you decide if utilization of these benefits will work for you.

Eligibility

When are benefits available?

- January 1, 2020 for non-bargaining employees.
- April 1, 2020 for bargaining employees.

Who is eligible to receive the benefit?

You are eligible if you worked at least 820 hours (about 16 hours a week) in Washington during the qualifying period. The 820 hours can be at one job or combined from multiple jobs.

What is the qualifying period?

The qualifying period is the first four of the last five completed calendar quarters starting from the day you intend to take leave.

Premium

Who pays for this benefit?

You pay the family leave portion of the premium. Because the PUD has been approved for a voluntary medical plan, you do not have to pay the medical leave portion of the premium. You can estimate your family leave premium using the [premium calculator](#).

When do payroll deductions begin?

- If you are a non-bargaining employee, your payroll deductions began in January of 2019. If you are a bargaining employee, your payroll deductions began April 1, 2020.

If I work for two different employers, do I have to pay premiums at both?

Yes, premiums are to be collected on all wages earned by employees in the state of Washington.

If I leave the PUD, what happens to my premiums?

Premiums paid and remitted for PFML are retained by the Employment Security Department (ESD).

Can I “opt out” of PFML?

No, PUD workers must participate in PFML.

Benefit

What qualifying events are eligible for paid family leave?

- Care for a family member with a serious health condition
- Birth, adoption or foster placement of a child
- A qualifying military exigency

Who is considered a family member?

- Spouse or domestic partner
- Children (biological, adopted, foster or stepchild)
- Grandchildren
- Siblings
- Parents and legal guardians (including in-law and in loco parentis)
- Grandparents
- Son-in-law and daughter-in-law
- Any individual who regularly resides in the employee’s home where the relationship creates an expectation that the employee care for the person, and that individual depends on the employee for care (effective July 24, 2021).

How much leave can I take?

Up to 12 weeks of family leave per benefit year or 16 weeks of combined family and medical leave per benefit year; additional 2 weeks if the medical leave is related to complications in pregnancy.

When does the benefit year begin?

The benefit year begins on the first day either paid family or medical leave is taken and continues for the following 12 months.

Does the leave have to be taken concurrently?

No, leave can be taken for intermittent or episodic leave periods, depending on the circumstances of your leave.

Is there a waiting period?

Yes, there is a seven-day waiting period, measured Sunday through Saturday. Note: The waiting period does not apply for bonding with a child.

What is the benefit amount?

Up to 90% of your average weekly wage with a minimum of \$100 and maximum amount established annually by ESD. You can estimate your benefit using the [benefit calculator](#) or contact ESD for your exact benefit amount.

How do I apply for PFML benefits?

Visit ESD's website at <https://paidleave.wa.gov/>

Will I be paid through the PUD while receiving PFML benefits?

No. Once your application for paid family leave is approved, ESD will send your benefit payments.

Can I use accrued personal leave to supplement the PFML benefit?

You can use personal leave while meeting the waiting period. Please note that any pay you receive while you receive a benefit payment from ESD will reduce your PFML benefit amount!

Do I have to exhaust my accrued personal leave before applying for PFML benefits?

No, you do not have to use up your accrued personal leave. You may choose to use accrued leave instead of applying for benefits through PFML.

What happens if I need to be out longer than the maximum allowed by the State?

You may request additional leave from the PUD if you have accrued personal leave available to use. You may also be eligible for additional leave protection under federal or state law.

Job & Benefit Protection

Is my job protected while I'm on PFML?

If you have worked 1250 hours in the 12 months preceding the start of your leave, your job is protected.

Will my PUD offered benefits continue while I'm on PFML?

Some benefits may continue (medical, vision, dental, life & disability), while others may not (PL accrual, holiday pay, etc.). Your PUD will work with you to come up with a suitable method to collect health and disability premiums from you while you are on leave.

Will I earn PERS service credits while I'm on PFML?

No, paid family leave is considered an unpaid, authorized leave of absence. You are allowed to buy back up to two years of service credit for an unpaid leave of absence. To restore service credit, you must return to work in a DRS retirement system-covered position and pay your contributions as well as the PUD's contributions for the period of time of leave. [DRS Notice 19-022](#) provides additional information on buying back service credits.

How does PFML work with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)?

PFML and FMLA usually run concurrent since many PFML events also qualify for FMLA. The use of FMLA does not reduce your allowed PFML benefit.

I hope you found some answers to your questions. If not, please see you friendly HR department.