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## Maternity Leave

The birth of a child is always an exciting and special time in the life of any parent. Whether it is the birth of their first or sixth child, each one creates precious memories that are treasured by parents worldwide. One issue that has the potential to mar this happy occasion is that of maternity leave.

The issue of paid maternity leave has been actively debated in political circles and the media over the past few months. So what are a pregnant woman's rights?

In New South Wales the Industrial Relations Act provides employees with minimum entitlements to parental leave. This Act allows women employed on a full-time, part-time or regular casual basis to take maternity leave, as long as they fulfill certain requirements. Some women are excluded from maternity leave rights, for example a woman who is employed by her spouse or a parent. At this point in time maternity leave remains unpaid.

So how long will you get off to spend with your new bundle of joy? Maternity leave can be taken during or after pregnancy and the total period of leave available is 12 months. During this time your employer must keep your job available for you. There are technical requirements about the giving of notice and the like in relation to when you intend to come back to work.

There are no age limitations for the taking of maternity leave, so employers can never say that you are too young or too old to be able to take it. Similarly, your employer cannot refuse you maternity leave just because you are not married.

Employers are under strict obligations to inform you of your rights in relation to maternity leave. You cannot be sacked from your job just because you fall pregnant.