

The Complete Employer's Guide

Bereavement Leave in Canada

ALL JURISDICTIONS

A comprehensive overview of bereavement leave entitlements in every jurisdiction.

Bereavement leave in Canada

Bereavement leave is job-protected time off work that an employee may take following the death of a family member. The minimum is set by the employment standards legislation of the jurisdiction where the employee works. Every Canadian jurisdiction except Nunavut offers job-protected bereavement leave and entitlements range from two to 10 days.

The difficulty for employers is that no two jurisdictions define the entitlement the same way. Day counts, pay, waiting periods, and qualifying relationships all differ, so a company-wide policy written to one jurisdiction's rules can fall below the minimum standards elsewhere. This guide outlines the minimum entitlements in all Canadian jurisdictions, explains the qualifiers and pay stipulations, and covers how to build a policy that goes beyond the legal minimum.

What is bereavement leave?

Bereavement leave is job-protected time off following the death of a family member, set by provincial or territorial employment standards legislation or by the Canada Labour Code for federally regulated employers. For some jurisdictions, bereavement leave also covers pregnancy loss.

The statutory entitlement set by employment standards is a minimum, so an employer can opt to provide more bereavement leave days, paid or unpaid, or extend the entitlement to qualifying relationships. Where a contract or collective agreement is more generous, the more generous term applies.

It's also important to remember that legislative minimums are generally dictated by the employee's physical work location, not an employer's head office. For example, an Ontario company with an employee working in Nova Scotia must follow Nova Scotia's employment standards.

Bereavement leave vs. compassionate care leave vs. personal or family responsibility leave

Bereavement leave: Time off after a death of a family member to grieve and attend a funeral or memorial service. Generally a short leave, usually measured in days.

Compassionate care leave: Time off to care for a qualifying person who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death. It's generally measured in weeks and supported by Employment Insurance caregiving benefits.

Personal or Family Responsibility leave: A short leave to address urgent personal matters or family responsibilities, such as illness, injury, medical emergencies, or unexpected caregiving needs.

In some jurisdictions, an employee may qualify for multiple leave entitlements consecutively, so an employee can be eligible for the above in sequence: compassionate care leave while a family member is dying, then bereavement leave after the death.

Bereavement leave by province and territory: A full comparison

Bereavement leaves across Canada vary. Most jurisdictions provide unpaid days only while four jurisdictions provide a mix of paid and unpaid days. Nunavut is the only jurisdiction that does not provide employees with statutory bereavement leave entitlement.

Jurisdiction	Total Days	Paid/Unpaid	Minimum Service
Federal (federally regulated employers)	Up to 10 days for death of an immediate family member Up to eight weeks for the death of a qualifying child	First three days paid; remainder unpaid	For paid days only, three consecutive months of employment
Alberta	Three days per calendar year	Unpaid	90 days
British Columbia	Three days per death	Unpaid	None
Manitoba	Five days for death of a family member Additional five days for pregnancy loss	Unpaid	30 days
New Brunswick	Five consecutive calendar days	Unpaid	None
Newfoundland and Labrador	Three days (two days if employed less than 30 days)	One day paid Two days unpaid	For paid day only, 30 days
Northwest Territories	Three days if the funeral or service is held in the same community the employee lives Seven days if held outside it.	Unpaid	None
Nova Scotia	Five consecutive working days	Unpaid	None

Bereavement leave by province and territory: A full comparison

Jurisdiction	Total Days	Paid/Unpaid	Minimum Service
Nunavut	No statutory bereavement leave	Not applicable	Not applicable
Ontario	Two days per calendar year	Unpaid	Two consecutive weeks
Prince Edward Island	- Three days for immediate family - Three days for extended family - Three days for pregnancy loss	- One day paid, two days unpaid for immediate family - Unpaid for extended family - One day paid, two days unpaid for pregnancy loss	None
Quebec	- Five days for a spouse, child, child of the spouse, parent, or sibling - One day for other listed relatives	- First two days are paid - One-day entitlement is unpaid.	None
Saskatchewan	Five days per death	Unpaid	More than 13 consecutive weeks
Yukon	One week	Unpaid	None

For a comprehensive list of qualifying relationships and the specifics of each jurisdiction's legislation, see the full table on our Constructive Dismissal Guide in our [Resource Centre](#).

Entitlements are legislated and amended without much notice, so confirm each provision against the current legislation before relying on it in a policy document.

Citation Canada supports employers in all 14 Canadian jurisdictions and updates its policy templates as provincial and territorial minimums change.

Federally regulated employers (Canada Labour Code)

Federally regulated employers follow the [Canada Labour Code](#) (CLC), not the employment standards legislation of the province they operate in. Banking, telecommunications, broadcasting, air transport, rail, marine shipping, interprovincial trucking, grain elevators, and First Nations band council operations and administration generally all fall under federal jurisdiction.

Section 210 of the CLC gives an employee up to 10 days of bereavement leave on the death of a member of their immediate family; the first three are paid at their regular rate once they have three consecutive months of continuous employment. On the death of a child, the leave extends to eight weeks.

A national employer applying Ontario's two-day bereavement leave standard across its business could fall short of the federal entitlement by up to eight days for federally regulated employees on its payroll, potentially resulting in an employment standards complaint.

Quebec: What's different

Quebec's [Act respecting labour standards](#) splits bereavement leave entitlement by relationship. On the death of a spouse, a child, the child of a spouse, a parent, or a sibling, an employee may be absent for five days, and the first two are paid. On the death of a son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandparent, grandchild, or a parent or sibling of the spouse, the entitlement is a single unpaid day.

In Quebec, there is also no service requirement, so a first-week employee has full entitlement, including the paid days.

Who qualifies for bereavement leave?

Eligibility for bereavement leave depends on the applicable service requirements of each jurisdiction and whether the death or pregnancy loss falls within the jurisdiction's qualifying circumstances. Each jurisdiction's definition of immediate family for the purpose of qualifying relationships is different. In general, all jurisdictions with statutory bereavement leave include a spouse, child, parent, and sibling. British Columbia extends this to any person living with the employee as a family member. Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island extend this to a person the employee considers a close relative, which is deliberately open-ended.

Service requirements also vary, sometimes depending on whether the leave is paid or unpaid. Some jurisdictions have no minimum service requirement to qualify for bereavement leave. Ontario requires two consecutive weeks of employment while Manitoba requires 30 days. Alberta requires 90 days and Saskatchewan requires more than 13 weeks. Newfoundland and Labrador does not have a service requirement for two unpaid days, but it requires 30 days for an additional paid day.

In most jurisdictions, part-time and casual employees are eligible for the same statutory days as full-time employees. However, paid bereavement days do not necessarily mean employees are paid for days they were not scheduled to work.

Multiple deaths in one year are also treated differently depending on the jurisdiction. Ontario and Alberta cap bereavement leave per calendar year, so employees may have fewer or no statutory days remaining following a second loss while in other jurisdictions, bereavement leave is available per death. Be sure to address both situations explicitly in your policy.

Is bereavement leave paid in Canada?

In most of Canada, statutory bereavement leave is unpaid. Only four jurisdictions require an employer to pay any part of it.

- **Federal:** The first three of 10 days, for employees with three consecutive months of service.
- **Quebec:** The first two of the five days available on the death of a spouse, child or the child of a spouse, parent, or sibling, with no service requirement.
- **Prince Edward Island:** One of the three days available on the death of an immediate family member.
- **Newfoundland and Labrador:** One of the three days for employees with 30 days of service

The remaining nine jurisdictions require unpaid leave only, and as outlined in the chart, employees in Nunavut are not entitled to any statutory bereavement leave.

Employment Insurance does not provide a dedicated bereavement benefit, leaving employees without a specific Employment Insurance income replacement benefit for statutory bereavement leave. However, employers may choose to pay employees for otherwise unpaid statutory bereavement leave days as a gesture of goodwill.

Best practices: Building a bereavement leave policy that goes beyond the minimum

These are the practices behind the best bereavement leave policy for employers:

1. Pay the leave even where the statutory minimum is unpaid. In an unpaid jurisdiction, the employee absorbs both a death and a shortfall in that period's pay. Paying these days across the organization costs little against turnover, and it's what employees notice most.
2. Broaden the definition of family beyond the statutory list. Cover the people the employee actually grieves, including chosen family and a partner's relatives, rather than reproducing the narrowest definition. Several jurisdictions already use this language.
3. Allow the days to be taken flexibly. Statutory leave often falls around the death or the funeral, but grief does not follow that schedule. Allow non-consecutive days and let employees extend leave using unpaid time or vacation.
4. Combine the leave with other support. Employee Assistance Program access, a flexible return-to-work schedule, and adjusted workload expectations matter more than the day count.
5. Standardize the request process. Approval may take one conversation with a manager who already knows the entitlement. Nobody should have to research their own rights or chase HR while planning a funeral or grieving the death of a loved one.
6. Train managers on what they can and cannot ask. The entitlement, the evidence the law permits them to request, and that the details of the death are not theirs to collect.
7. Document the leave and its pay treatment. Record the dates, which days were paid, and which entitlement was applied.
8. Review the policy regularly. Review it annually at minimum and whenever a jurisdiction amends its entitlements.



Common employer mistakes to avoid

Most bereavement leave complaints come from administrative error rather than bad faith. Some common mistakes to avoid include:

Applying the wrong jurisdiction's rules to staff employed across the country.

The employment standards of the jurisdiction under which the employee works govern entitlements, not the standards of the head office location. Remote hiring has made this a fast-growing source of error for many Canadian businesses.

Demanding proof not permitted by legislation.

Where legislation permits an employer to request evidence of entitlement to bereavement leave, the type and amount of evidence that is reasonable will depend on the jurisdiction and circumstances.

Denying leave to part-time or casual staff.

In most jurisdictions, they hold the same entitlement as full-time employees, and the days are not pro-rated.

Assuming a second death in the same year automatically does or does not qualify for additional bereavement leave.

Entitlements vary by jurisdiction, with some imposing annual limits and others providing leave for each qualifying death.

Penalizing an employee for taking protected leave

Disciplining an employee, reducing their shifts, withholding a bonus or assigning less favourable duties because they exercised their statutory bereavement leave rights may constitute unlawful reprisal. Where the employer's actions also result in a substantial change to the employee's terms or conditions of employment, they may support a constructive dismissal claim. Our constructive dismissal employer guide helps employers understand what constitutes constructive dismissal and offers guidance on reducing associated legal risks.

Leaving the policy unchanged after a legislative amendment.

When statutory entitlements are updated, an outdated policy can expose employers to non-compliance risks if employees receive less than their legal entitlements.

How to handle a bereavement leave request as a manager or HR professional

The first conversation sets the tone for everything that follows.

- 1 Respond promptly and confirm the entitlement yourself. Tell the employee how many days they have and how they are paid. Do not send them to the policy library to work it out themselves.
- 2 Confirm which jurisdiction's rules apply, based on where the employee works rather than where the company is headquartered.
- 3 Document the leave dates and pay treatment and record which statutory entitlement was applied.
- 4 Arrange coverage for their workload without asking them to organize it.
- 5 Plan a low-pressure return-to-work check-in. Ask what they need on the first day back and agree on workload for that week.

Need a ready-to-use bereavement leave policy template? Citation Canada's [HR templates and policy library](#) are built for Canadian employers and are updated as legislation changes in all 14 jurisdictions.



Frequently asked questions

? How many days of bereavement leave are employees entitled to in Canada?

It depends on the jurisdiction. The statutory minimums for ordinary bereavement leave range from two days in Ontario to 10 days for federally regulated employees. Nunavut has no statutory bereavement leave at all. Bereavement leave entitlements are governed by the legislation applicable to the employee's place of employment rather than where the employer is headquartered.

? Is bereavement leave paid or unpaid in Canada?

In most of Canada, it's unpaid. Four jurisdictions require pay: the federal jurisdiction pays the first three of 10 days after three months of service; Quebec pays the first two of five days; Prince Edward Island pays one of three days; and Newfoundland and Labrador pays one of three after 30 days. Employment Insurance does not provide a dedicated bereavement benefit, although employers may choose to provide paid leave beyond statutory requirements.

? Does bereavement leave differ by jurisdiction?

Yes, substantially. Day counts, pay, minimum service, and the family members who qualify all vary based on jurisdiction. Bereavement leave in Ontario is two unpaid days per calendar year; in British Columbia, it's three unpaid days per death; in Alberta, it's three unpaid days per calendar year after 90 days; Manitoba and Saskatchewan provide five unpaid days; Quebec provides five days, with two paid. A national employer can adopt a consistent bereavement leave policy provided it meets or exceeds the statutory requirements in each applicable jurisdiction.

? What is bereavement leave for federally regulated employees?

Under section 210 of the Canada Labour Code, a federally regulated employee is entitled to up to 10 days of bereavement leave following the death of a member of their immediate family or a family member for whom they were taking compassionate care or critical illness leave. The first three days are paid if they have already completed three consecutive months of continuous employment. On the death of an employee's child or their spouse's or common-law partner's child (provided the child meets the statutory definition), the leave extends to up to eight weeks. Banks, telecoms, airlines, railways, interprovincial trucking, and First Nations band council operations and administration are generally federally regulated.

? How is bereavement leave different in Quebec?

Quebec provides different bereavement leave entitlements depending on the employee's relationship to the deceased. Five days apply following the death of a spouse, child, child of the spouse, parent or sibling, with the first two days paid. One unpaid day applies following the death of a grandparent, grandchild, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, or the employee's spouse's parent or sibling. There is no minimum service requirement.

Who counts as a qualifying relationship for bereavement leave purposes?

Jurisdictions with statutory bereavement leave generally include a spouse, child, parent, and sibling among the qualifying relationships. British Columbia includes anyone living with the employee as a family member. Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island recognize persons the employee considers a close relative. Many jurisdictions also name in-laws expressly, and Ontario provides for a relative who is dependent on the employee for care.

Are part-time employees entitled to bereavement leave?

Yes. In most Canadian jurisdictions, part-time, casual, and full-time employees hold the same statutory entitlement, expressed as several days rather than hours, so it's not pro-rated. Where a service requirement applies, it applies equally, and payment for any paid bereavement leave is calculated according to the applicable employment standards legislation.

How much notice does an employee need to give before taking bereavement leave?

Notice requirements vary by jurisdiction, including when notice must be provided and whether it must be written. Most jurisdictions ask the employee to tell the employer before the leave begins, or as soon as possible afterward where that is not practical. Some add a timing condition for the leave itself: in New Brunswick, the leave must begin no later than the day of the funeral. Failure to provide notice does not necessarily eliminate an employee's entitlement to bereavement leave, where it exists, although the consequences depend on the jurisdiction and circumstances.

Can an employer require proof of death or a funeral to approve leave?

It depends on the jurisdiction. Where an employee has a statutory entitlement to bereavement leave, the employer's approval process cannot override that entitlement. Where employment standards legislation permits an employer to request evidence, the evidence should be reasonable in the circumstances. Employers should check the applicable provincial, territorial, or federal rules before requesting documentation and applying their policy consistently.

What happens if more than one qualifying member passes away in the same year?

It depends on the jurisdiction. Ontario and Alberta cap the entitlement per calendar year, so a second death in the same year does not create a second allotment of statutory days. Because the answer is not intuitive, clearly state your company's entitlements in your bereavement policy, and consider granting a fresh allotment regardless of the statutory minimum.



Can an employee take bereavement leave and compassionate care leave at the same time?

Generally, these leaves are taken in sequence rather than at the same time. Compassionate care leave allows employees to provide care or support to a family member with a serious medical condition and significant risk of death. Eligible employees may receive Employment Insurance compassionate care benefits. Bereavement leave applies following a qualifying death. An employee who has taken compassionate care leave may also qualify for bereavement leave, subject to the applicable legislation.

Get Your Bereavement Leave Policy Right Before You Need It

A bereavement leave policy can set out every jurisdiction's minimum, but the risk in any given case sits in the wording and how a manager interprets it. Although bereavement leave is often a short-term entitlement, administering it incorrectly can result in employment standards complaints, particularly when decisions are made quickly, under pressure, by managers unfamiliar with the applicable requirements. The fix is a policy that answers the question before anyone asks it.

Citation Canada supports employers in all 14 Canadian jurisdictions: [Live HR Advice](#) for same-day answers from Canadian HR specialists, policies and templates kept current as jurisdictional employment standards change, and [HR consulting](#) for a full compliance review. [Book a demo](#) or [request a quote today!](#)

This article provides general HR and legal information for Canadian employers and is not legal advice. Employers dealing with an active dispute should consult legal counsel or Citation Canada's advisory services about their circumstances.

HR and safety support Canadian businesses can count on

We hope this guide has helped. But no resource can cover every situation or change that might be coming. Citation Canada gives you the experts, software, and content to stay on top of HR and safety compliance, across every jurisdiction, every day.

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