

BULLETIN

Compassionate leave

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I am a part-time dietitian working for the Northern Health Authority under the Health Science Professionals contract. My mother has passed away, and I need to travel to Ontario to be with my family and help with funeral arrangements. How much compassionate time am I allowed? Do I need to provide a death certificate? Is my leave pro-rated because I'm part-time?



Members are entitled to paid compassionate leave to deal with the death of a family member or relative. (The definition of "relative" is outlined in the collective agreement. Members may also be granted paid time for travelling.

One commonly cited arbitration states that the purpose of compassionate leave is -to provide an employee with time off without loss of pay to meet and deal with a personal tragedy, make necessary funeral arrangements and support and provide after care for the deceaseds survivors as well as to provide the necessary private time to deal with personal grief."

The time off for compassionate leave does not have to be consecutive and does not have to be at the time of death. The leave is for the purpose of grieving and the process of grieving for each individual is different.

Full-time and part-time employees are entitled to 21.6 hours for compassionate leave. This summer, HSA won an arbitration case on behalf of members confirming that compassionate leave is not pro-rated for part-time employees. For members covered by the Health Science Professionals contract, Article 20 ... Special Leave provides an additional 7.2 hours as described in that article.

If travel is required, an additional 14.4 hours with pay are available under this article and an additional 7.2 hours under the Article 20 ... Special Leave provisions. This time can only be claimed for travel on days when the member was scheduled to work.

When travel is required, the maximum amount of paid time off when there is a death in the family is seven days. This includes three days of compassionate leave plus one day special leave. Travel time of up to three days is available: two days under this article plus an additional day under Article 20 ... Special Leave.

The employer is obliged to honour requests for compassionate leave, and must make every effort to grant additional compassionate leave of absence without pay if requested by the member.

It is not necessary for a member to prove that she requires the time off. Generally speaking the purpose of these provisions of the contract is to ensure that members do not lose income because of the time off required to grieve a death in the family. Compassionate leave is not available if a member is on an unpaid leave of absence.

Similar provisions apply for HSA members covered by the Nurses, Community Social Services, and other contracts. See your contract for specific details, and consult your steward if you have any questions. 

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