

CHILDBIRTH ACCOMMODATION POLICY FAQ

Childbirth Accommodation? Don't you mean Maternity Leave?

The Childbirth Accommodation is not a "leave," in that no separation from the Institute or the student's academic program occurs. This is especially important for international students, as any separation may impact their visa status.

Who is covered by the Childbirth Accommodation?

This policy applies to any full-time, registered graduate student woman. It is limited to women who anticipate giving birth and does not apply to adoption or to men in support of their wives or partners during childbirth.

Who administers the policy?

The Office of the Dean for Graduate Education (<http://web.mit.edu/odge/>) administers the policy through a petition process.

What is the duration of the policy?

A student anticipating childbirth is eligible for a period of up to eight weeks of Childbirth Accommodation. Normally, the accommodation period begins on the date specified in a petition filed with and approved by the Graduate Students Office; or in cases wherein childbirth occurs prior to filing the petition, on the actual date of childbirth.

I'm on an RA/TA. Will I still receive a stipend during this period?

For the approved period of accommodation, students supported by an RA or TA appointment will receive a salary that is paid from the Childbirth Accommodation Insurance Pool, as described below. The payment will be prorated appropriately, for students with partial appointments. For RA appointments, the insurance pool payment will replace the tuition and salary normally distributed from the RA account. For TA appointments, only the salary component will be paid from the pool, and the student will not be responsible for the TA tuition component.

I receive my stipend as a lump sum at the beginning of the term. How is this affected by the Childbirth Accommodation?

Students who are supported by fellowships internal to MIT normally have salary distributed as lump-sum payments at the beginning of each term. Students supported in this manner and approved for the Childbirth Accommodation are not entitled to additional payments from the Childbirth Accommodation Insurance Pool.

I'm on an external fellowship. Are there any special considerations?

For the major external fellowship providers (NSF, NDSEG, Hertz and Jacob Javitts), the student will normally be required only to notify the sponsor, through the ODGE Fellowships Administrator, of the accommodation period. Those providers have indicated to the ODGE that they do not anticipate suspension of fellowship benefits. Other fellowship providers may have different expectations, so it is advisable to contact the provider directly and adhere to their requirements for the accommodation.

How does the Childbirth Accommodation affect my academic requirements?

Normally, approval of Childbirth Accommodation will stop the academic and research clocks with regards to assignments due, reports anticipated, or other class and research related requirements. Otherwise, faculty are expected and encouraged to make arrangements with the student to submit work for completion of requirements when the student returns. Where appropriate, “O” and “OX” grades can be assigned. In most cases grades of “Incomplete” would not be appropriate.

I’m an international student. Does this affect the Childbirth Accommodation?

Departments have been informed that they should be sensitive to the potential impact of the period on the visa status of international students, and are expected to consult with the International Students Office during the planning process. This is one of the reasons that this is not referred to as “Maternity Leave,” as no actual separation from the Institute or academic program will occur.

What if I don’t have an RA or TA? I’m not even funded!

Students who are not supported by RA or TA assignments may petition to take advantage of a Childbirth Accommodation period, but are not entitled to tuition or salary funding from the Childbirth Accommodation Insurance Pool. Students will retain access to on-campus medical facilities and eligibility for outside hospitalization benefits, provided that appropriate tuition and health insurance fees have been paid for the term in which delivery is anticipated. Students residing on campus and approved for Childbirth Accommodation can remain in the residence hall, as appropriate for the specific hall. The same policies apply with respect to the student’s academic requirements as for a student on an RA or TA.

What should I do before I apply for the Childbirth Accommodation?

To begin planning for the accommodation period, the student is strongly encouraged to initiate conversations with advisors and departmental administrators approximately five months prior to anticipated childbirth. This planning period will permit the department and the student to consider together:

- 1) the advisability of and alternatives for a TA assignment in the term anticipated for delivery;
- 2) plans for time-sensitive research presentations or reports; and
- 3) other issues of mutual importance (*e.g.*, field work, doctoral qualifying examinations, publication deadlines, or other milestones in the student’s program).

Normally, the length of the accommodation period will be decided in consultation with the Dean for Graduate Students.

How is the Childbirth Accommodation approved?

Approval of Childbirth Accommodation is granted by the Dean for Graduate Students, after appropriate consultation with the student’s department. Normally, the accommodation is granted to applicable women graduate students who have submitted a petition and appropriate documentation of anticipated childbirth and who have initiated planning within the department prior to delivery.

What services am I entitled to while I am on the Childbirth Accommodation? Will I still have access to MIT Medical and be covered by my Student Extended Insurance Plan?

Approval of Childbirth Accommodation retains the student's access to on-campus medical facilities and does not affect eligibility for outside hospitalization benefits, provided that appropriate tuition and health insurance fees have been paid for the term in which delivery is anticipated.

Will I be able to retain my on-campus housing while on the Childbirth Accommodation?

Normally, students residing on campus and approved for Childbirth Accommodation can remain in the residence hall, as appropriate for the specific hall.

Will using the Childbirth Accommodation affect my visa status?

For international students, the policy is intended to maintain full-time student status and should not otherwise affect current visa status. The accommodation is intended to enable childbirth and subsequent return to classes and research in as seamless a manner as possible. However, international students should discuss the intended accommodation period with the International Students Office at the beginning of the planning period specified above, to identify and address proactively any individual or unique visa issues and/or to consider the latest applicable regulations.

I'm a TA. Will I still be expected to teach? How will my duties be handled?

Students who will be temporarily leaving TA assignments are permitted to consider some limited ongoing duties (*e.g.*, grading, preparing course materials, or other non-intensive duties). Such services cannot be required by TA supervisors as a condition of the accommodation; and, if agreed upon at all, should be negotiated sensitively with the student's needs in mind. The student should recognize that it may not be feasible to return to a TA assignment after the Childbirth Accommodation period, and should work with her department proactively to make alternative arrangements for ongoing support. In this regard, departments are encouraged to make reasonable efforts on behalf of the student but are not required to continue salary payments if arrangements cannot be made. With appropriate advance planning, such circumstances should be rare. When they occur, however, departments should consult with the Dean for Graduate Students about the availability of assistance for the remainder of the relevant term.

How will salary payments be handled? What will the amount of the salary be while I am on the Childbirth Accommodation?

For the period of accommodation, salary payments for supported students will be made from the Childbirth Accommodation Insurance Pool, at a fixed rate to be set annually. Consequently, RA or TA salary payments may not be a dollar-for-dollar replacement of a student's current salary; that is, in some cases they may be somewhat less than or somewhat more than the normal payment that the student has been receiving.

When are the actual dates set for my specific Childbirth Accommodation?

Upon notification of the impending or actual childbirth by the student and the student's physician, the Graduate Students Office will notify relevant department and central administrative offices that Childbirth Accommodation has been approved and the dates for which the period has been granted. It is the student's responsibility to work with faculty and with departmental administrators towards arrangements for course completion and for continuation of research activities before and following the period. International students are advised to ensure their continued compliance with current immigration regulations as they plan for the period.