



Frequently asked Questions for UGME Learners Considering Pregnancy and/or Parenthood

Statement from MSS Equity Committee

The MSS Equity Committee supports equal leave of absence and rural rotation accommodations for all student parents, regardless of gender or child-bearing status:

- To promote the wellbeing of all student parents and all different kinds of families.
- To promote the wellbeing of children.
- To promote a better gender balance and equity in the family and in the labour market.

Frequently asked questions

Please refer to the UGME Absences and Leaves Policy and the UGME Guidelines for accommodation of pregnancy found at <https://www.mcgill.ca/ugme/academic-policies>. This FAQ compliments these documents, and some of the content also applies to non-child-bearing parents.

Q. Is it possible to start a leave of absence (LOA) part-way through a block/rotation without having to repeat the block/rotation?

A. The “25% rule” (see [absences and leaves policy](#)) applies: if all components (i.e. small groups, anatomy lab, small groups, or clerkship clinical rotation shifts) are at least 75% complete, the block/rotation should be considered complete. It would then be possible to defer an FMD or TCP block exam or progress test for later, during the LOA. There are no “shelf” exams at the end of clerkship rotations at McGill.

Q. What is the maximum time off possible for parental leave without taking a full year off?

A. This depends greatly on the stage of training. Although students should consult with the UGME Office, Associate Dean to plan a parental leave, the following are some explanations and possibilities for medium-term LOAs:

The general absences and leaves policy states: “For short-term leaves, within 3 weeks of the birth/adoption of a new child, a parent may be excused for up to 7 consecutive days.” and “To accommodate a medium term leave, the Associate Dean UGME may exempt a student who is



in good academic standing from a portion of a course or up to 8-weeks of elective and/or vacation requirements” (but this may delay graduation).

FMD: The 25% rule applies to each component making up a block, including small groups, which happen longitudinally, and blocks are short - 1 to 2 months long. Therefore, options for a medium-term leave are very limited. However, summer vacation between year 1 & 2 (July & August) could allow for 2 months off for new parents. Students may also take advantage of lecture recordings (the vast majority of FMD lectures are recorded, and take place almost every morning) to stay home with a newborn. Students must attend mandatory activities like small groups and the Longitudinal Family Medicine Experience (half-day afternoons mainly) weekly (and may opt to attend optional anatomy/histology labs).

TCP: Attendance is mandatory for all activities, including lectures, and the different components are mainly sequential, not longitudinal, within a block. Therefore the options for medium-term leaves, and time at home for new parents, are very limited due to the 25% rule.

Clerkship: In keeping with the general absences and leaves policy, official medium-term leaves are more accessible at this time. It may be possible to string together vacation weeks at the time of birth/reception of a child. Possible options include: using one’s 3 to 5 weeks of vacation time as parental leave; beginning clerkship one month early, during the vacation between years 2 & 3 (July), to allow a student to take this vacation time later in year 3 following the birth/reception of a child; forfeiting up to 4 weeks of elective time to take parental leave; taking a medium-term leave of absence, then rejoining the same clerkship stream and completing the missed core clerkship rotations in spring/summer after year 4. Some of these options may delay participation in CARMS (aka residency applications, which are due once a year in November), graduation (end of May, possible to delay to the fall), or starting residency (usually July 1st; options to delay this start-date are program-specific).

Q. What is the “mask fit training” mentioned in the pregnancy accommodation policy?

A. Mask fit training is required by McGill Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) prior to an individual using an organic solvents mask (cartridge mask, different than N95) in the anatomy lab. This mask is recommended for use by pregnant students to reduce exposure to potentially teratogenic chemicals used to preserve cadavers in the lab, including formaldehyde (see <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/repro/formaldehyde.html>). Half-day training sessions for employees are arranged by McGill EHS periodically, and students may join a group for the training. It is important to note that **training sessions are few and far between**, so pregnant students should contact the WELL office as soon as possible to arrange participation in a session to reduce their exclusion from the anatomy lab. **The cost for the mask fit session is the responsibility of the pregnant student, and varies as it is divided by the number of participants (\$200-600).** Masks and cartridges are graciously provided by the WELL office and are available at the Anatomy Lab by arrangement with the Director.



Q. What are the alternative anatomy lab exams, and when are these offered?

A. Although attendance at anatomy labs during FMD is not mandatory nor recorded, and excellent review materials exist [online](#), students must pass practical anatomy lab exams to be promoted to the next component. Exams occur at the end of Block C (Cardio and Resp), end of Block E (Renal and GI), mid- and end of Block H (Movement), end of Block I (Pelvis), and end of Block J (Neuro), and take place in the anatomy lab. Pregnant students who have been unable to obtain mask fit training prior to an anatomy exam will be offered an alternative exam outside of the laboratory, using photos of anatomy specimens. Some students have found this modified anatomy experience (self-study + alternative exam) lacking, but do know that this option exists.

Q. Which exposures may pose health risks to a fetus/pregnant student? Which rotations should I be concerned about?

A. Some exposures to consider: radiation (eg. TCP radiology, some surgical subspecialties like orthopedics); anesthetic gases (eg. TCP anesthesia); infectious diseases, especially TORCH infections (eg. pediatrics); shift work (eg. obstetrics); and prolonged standing (surgery, internal medicine rounds). Good resources: [Motherisk](#), [CDC](#). The UGME Guidelines for accommodation of pregnancy states that accommodations can be made to limit hazardous exposures in pregnancy.

Q. Is it possible to resume studies part-time as a new parent?

A. No, there is no part-time option in McGill UGME.

Q. Am I eligible for student loans while on LOA? Do I need to repay them? What about my line of credit? Are there any other expenses I need to consider?

A. Medical students are only eligible for AFE (Quebec) student loans if enrolled full-time during the term in question (because there is no part-time status in UGME). Therefore, if you stop mid-university “term” and as such only have part-time credits for that term (despite having participated in school full-time up until the LOA), you cannot take advantage of being “deemed a full-time student” despite qualifying for this special status during pregnancy and while parenting young children. New parents are excused from repaying AFE loans during a LOA.

To be eligible for QPIP (Quebec Parental Insurance Program) you must have a minimum of \$2000 insurable income.



Students with lines of credit should confirm with their bank that they will not be suspended during a LOA (unlikely).

Possible extra expenses: rural family medicine rotation, mask fit, delaying starting residency (salaried), premium cost of childcare for shift work if needed.

Q. Should I be worried about discrimination during pregnancy or as a parent?

A. It would be wonderful if there was no discrimination and the WELL Office has been very vocal about this advocacy piece

The WELL Office will communicate a student's approved accommodations related to pregnancy and breastfeeding to tutors and supervisors. These accommodations should not, in theory, impact evaluation of the student's performance.

The Canadian Human Rights Act entitles all individuals to equal employment opportunities without regard to family status and sex (including pregnancy or childbirth). CARMS interviewers are therefore prohibited from discriminating against a pregnant student and from asking interviewees about family status or family planning.

Q. Is it possible to continue breastfeeding after returning to FMD/TCP/Clerkship?

A. New parents may bring newborns to lectures and some activities in order to facilitate breastfeeding. A lactation room is available in the Meredith Annex, which is near the main lecture theatres for FMD. The WELL office will assist students in organizing lactation rooms and a break schedule at clinical sites. Breastfeeding students will be accommodated with rural rotations within daily driving distance from home. Please note that in order to benefit from the stipend provided by the site, trainees must reside in the region for the entire rotation.

Q. Is there a student daycare centre?

A. Students have access to the [McGill Childcare Centre](#) on lower campus, but there is no guarantee of an available spot. Other search avenues: [Laplaceo-5.com](#) is a centralized waiting list system for daycares in Montreal and [magarderie.com](#) also lists available places (both sites can be searched by postal code); neighbourhood-specific parenting Facebook groups often list openings at local daycares. Daycare is heavily subsidized in Quebec, so the cost is much lower than in the rest of Canada.



Your question wasn't answered here?

- The [Wellness Consultant](#) at the WELL Office is the confidential point of contact within the UGME.
- The MSS Equity Committee can address your equity concerns.
- Student-parents are happy to share their experiences, answer questions, or lend support via the McGill Medicine Student Parents Facebook page.
- McGill SEDE Family Care Program on Facebook offers support, events, and resources.