

## What triggers an FMLA Leave qualifying event?

**How do I know if an employee's medical absence qualifies for FMLA leave?  
What is considered a serious health condition?**

### **Definition of Serious Health Condition**

A serious health condition is an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves either an overnight stay in a medical care facility, or continuing treatment by a health care provider for a condition that either prevents the employee from performing the functions of the employee's job, or prevents the qualified family member from participating in school or other daily activities. Subject to certain conditions, the continuing treatment requirement may be met by a period of incapacity of more than 3 consecutive calendar days combined with at least two visits to a health care provider or one visit and a regimen of continuing treatment, or incapacity due to pregnancy, or incapacity due to a chronic condition. Other conditions may meet the definition of continuing treatment.

Under the FMLA, a [serious health condition](#) is an illness, injury, impairment or physical or mental condition that involves *inpatient care* (defined as an overnight stay in a hospital, hospice or residential medical care facility; any overnight admission to such facilities is an automatic trigger for FMLA eligibility) or *continuing treatment* by a health care provider. Examples include the following:

**Continuing treatment** by a health care provider that results in an incapacity (inability to work, attend school or participate in other daily activities) of more than three consecutive calendar days with either two or more in-person visits to the health care provider within 30 days of the date of incapacity OR one in-person visit to the health care provider with a regimen of continuing treatment, such as prescription medication, physical therapy, etc. In either situation, the first visit to the health care provider must occur within seven days of the first date of incapacity. Examples include pneumonia, surgery or broken/fractured bones.

**Chronic conditions** that require periodic visits to a health care provider, continue over an extended period of time and may cause episodic rather than continuing periods of incapacity of more than three days. Examples of chronic conditions include asthma, diabetes and epilepsy.

**Incapacity for pregnancy or prenatal care** (any such incapacity is FMLA-protected regardless of the period of incapacity). For example, a pregnant employee may be unable to report to work due to severe morning sickness.

**Permanent or long-term conditions** such as Alzheimer's, severe stroke or terminal disease.

**Conditions requiring multiple treatments and recovery** from treatments, such as cancer, severe arthritis and kidney disease.

**Treatment for substance abuse** by a health care provider or by a provider of health care services on referral by a health care provider.

**Serious health condition** means an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves either:

Inpatient care (*i.e.*, an overnight stay) in a hospital, hospice, or residential medical-care facility, including any period of incapacity (*i.e.*, inability to work, attend school, or perform other regular daily activities) or subsequent treatment in connection with such inpatient care; **or** Continuing treatment by a health care provider, which includes:

(1) A period of incapacity lasting more **than three consecutive full calendar days**, and any subsequent treatment or period of incapacity relating to the same condition that **also** includes:

treatment two or more times by or under the supervision of a health care provider (*i.e.*, in-person visits, the first within 7 days and both within 30 days of the first day of incapacity); **or**

one treatment by a health care provider (*i.e.*, an in-person visit within 7 days of the first day of incapacity) with a continuing regimen of treatment (*e.g.*, prescription medication, physical therapy); **or**

(2) Any period of incapacity related to pregnancy or for prenatal care. A visit to the health care provider is not necessary for each absence; **or**

(3) Any period of incapacity or treatment for a chronic serious health condition which continues over an extended period of time, requires periodic visits (at least twice a year) to a health care provider, and may involve occasional episodes of incapacity. A visit to a health care provider is not necessary for each absence; **or**

(4) A period of incapacity that is permanent or long-term due to a condition for which treatment may not be effective. Only supervision by a health care provider is required, rather than active treatment; **or**

(5) Any absences to receive multiple treatments for restorative surgery or for a condition that would likely result in a period of incapacity of more than three days if not treated.