



RAF Maternity Passport

What is the RAF Maternity Passport for?



To address a potential gap between military and NHS Health services using a Maternity Passport: a document to ensure continuity of care between health professionals.

Service families often move during maternity leave, whether due to assignment or moving to their family home. This can have a significant impact on their normal social support network and engagement with antenatal care.

During this time the Royal Air Force aims to make the transition between going on maternity/shared parental leave and returning to work as smooth as possible. This booklet provides:

- Contact details for their Medical Officer (MO) (a collective term for their military GP or Civilian Medical Practitioner (CMP) and any NHS GP they register with.
- Welfare contact details.
- Contact details for Defence Physiotherapy and Mental Health Service, both of which offer self-referral.
- A brief overview of mental and physical health conditions that can affect individuals who are pregnant or have recently given birth, and advice and support on how to recognise the symptoms and where to get help.
- Information for NHS GP's and healthcare providers on the support they should provide to Service Personnel who are on maternity leave.
- It should be read in conjunction with the 'RAF Guide to Parental Mental Health' and the '[Managing your pregnancy and maternity leave in the RAF: A Guide for Service Personnel](#)' provided with your parenting pack.

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Maternity leave and your healthcare

During maternity/shared parental leave your healthcare usually remains with DPHC. However, you may need to register as a temporary resident with a civilian NHS GP to enable access to local pregnancy and maternity care if you will be living away from your usual unit or if your unit doesn't have a direct link to local midwife-led care.

Contact this NHS GP for:

- Health concerns whilst away from work.
- Your 6/8-week check (if this is not offered at the NHS GP then please contact your nearest military medical centre to have this check-up).

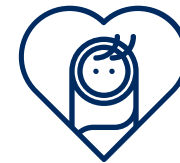
Your health visitor is linked to your local NHS GP practice and they share information about your care.

NHS GPs can't see your Defence medical notes but they can be requested with your consent.

Your NHS GP, MO, midwife and health visitor should be screening you for mental health concerns at each appointment. Remember you can self-refer at any time.

Services available to you

1. GP / health visitor may not know you can access Defence healthcare services such as physiotherapy and mental health services.
2. NHS health care can vary around the country, your health visitor / GP will know local services.
3. Under the Armed Forces covenant you are entitled to local NHS and Defence healthcare services if required.



Information for GPs / Health visitors / Midwives

'The Armed Forces community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services in the area where they live.'

Armed Forces Covenant



Thank you for registering this Servicewoman. During maternity leave Servicewomen still have access to Defence healthcare services: primary care, occupational medicine, physio, and community mental health services. Geographically it's not always possible to use these facilities. Therefore, care is shared between Defence and NHS Primary Health Care services.

If you have any concerns regarding your patient's mental health, please contact the Department of Community Mental Health (see contacts) for advice regarding access to services which may differ to local provision.

If the Servicewoman is suffering from any post-natal issues such as rectus diastasis or incontinence, they can access specialist physiotherapy through Defence during their maternity leave, please see the contacts overleaf or encourage the woman to self-refer.

This same pathway can be used for any physical injury that might benefit from physiotherapy.

This document aims to bridge the gap between healthcare systems, but please feel free to contact the military medical centre (see contacts) for more information if required. The Passport includes patient information including past medical history and medications. There are contact details for Defence health services should you need to access to additional information and services for this Servicewoman.

Please feel free to contact the military medical centre (see contacts) for more information if required.

This patient is entitled to the same services available to your permanent population and, if appropriate, should be referred to these accordingly. Choices between the services should be made in conjunction with the patient based on clinical need, location, and preference.

www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-support-for-the-uk-armed-forces
www.gov.uk/government/policies/armed-forces-covenant

Bridge the gap

Complete the following sections with your MO prior to going on maternity leave.

Your MO will identify information in your notes that your NHS healthcare providers should know about.

This is YOUR document; YOU choose what information to include to help manage YOUR healthcare. A summary printout of your medical records may be helpful. Keep a copy of your discharge summary from hospital after the birth for your military medical records.

About me

Please include past medical history and medication.

Past medical history

Medication

Please record all relevant contact details below before going on maternity leave

Who?

When?

Civilian temporary GP:

Address:

Email:

Tel:

If you move during maternity leave and do not live near a military medical centre then you can register with an NHS GP. You may also need to register your baby if your military medical centre does not see families.

Registered Military Medical Centre:

Address:

Email:

Tel:

If you live close to a military medical centre for your maternity leave then you should register there (or remain registered).

Who?

When?

My Physiotherapy Facility (PCRF)

You can self-refer to physiotherapy if you have any injuries during pregnancy or maternity leave. Put the contact details here for the facility that is going to be easiest for you to travel to.

DCMH Colchester

Reed Hill House
Merville Barracks
Colchester, Essex, CO2 7UT
01206817057

You can self-refer or your NHS GP can. Certain professions will be requested to contact their MO in the first instance (for example: aircrew, controllers, divers, or Special Forces) however please contact DCMH Colchester if concerned.

Significant others

Record the details of any other person or agency that is important to your care.

Mental health during and after pregnancy

10-20%

of the population suffer with mental health issues during pregnancy and in the year after birth.

Service Personnel share this risk and vulnerability.

If you have history of any mental health conditions you are at an increased risk of mental health issues during pregnancy and postnatally.

Problems that may occur

- Postnatal and antenatal depression
- Perinatal anxiety
- Perinatal OCD
- PTSD and birth trauma
- Postpartum psychosis

Service Personnel may be subject to extra stressors such as relocation, non-resident partners, returning to work full time, future deployments etc.

There are good and successful treatment options, but up to half of sufferers are unrecognised and so don't receive treatment early enough. Treatment is confidential.

If symptoms are recognised early you may only need some simple support and be well before you return to work.

Why are service mothers reluctant to seek help?



For more detailed information, please see the RAF Guide to Parental Mental Health provided within your parenting pack.

Why not try these self tests?

Self test 1

1. Have you found yourself overly worrying about your baby being in danger when others don't?
2. Have you found yourself imagining your baby coming to harm?
3. Have you found your concerns over your baby's safety are affecting your daily life?
4. Have you experienced panic attacks?

If you answered **yes** to any of these questions, you may be suffering with anxiety

Self test 2

1. During the past month have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
2. During the past month have you been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?

If you answered **yes** to either of these questions, you may be suffering with depression.

These self tests don't cover everything; also check out the behaviours and symptoms page.

How do I seek help?

*If you feel you are in a mental health crisis
Call NHS 111 > option 2*

Service Personnel who are pregnant or in the first year after childbirth can self refer to military mental health services via the Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH) Colchester who will make sure you are seen at your closest DCMH.

Call them on 01206 787057 and tell them you wish to refer yourself. You will be put through to a nurse who will talk you through the process and arrange an appointment at a suitable location.

Certain professions will be requested to contact their MO in the first instance (e.g. aircrew, controllers, divers, and, special forces) this is to ensure appropriate occupational and regulatory oversight is arranged. If worried or concerned you will still be able to speak to someone at DCMH Colchester, they will be able to guide you to the correct person.

See your MO – this doesn't have to be in person. Contact your unit medical centre via telephone or using the eConsult service.

If you registered at an NHS practice for maternity leave - see your NHS GP, particularly if your closest DCMH is too far away.

Talk to your midwife or health visitor.

Many areas of the country have self-referral to civilian mental health services, you can usually find these by searching for 'improving access to psychological therapies' for your area.

The process of seeking help via Defence mental health services

1. Recognise you have a problem.
2. Self-referral or referral by your MO or NHS GP.
3. You will be offered an appointment with a specialist mental health practitioner who can assess your needs.
4. A treatment plan will be agreed with you. This may involve self-help, individual talking therapies, groups or medication.
5. If required, you will see a consultant psychiatrist to make sure your care plan is ideal for your individual case.
6. Treatment commences.

**'The care I received
no doubt saved my
life. I was extremely
lucky to have access
to military mental
health services.'**
Service mother



Returning to work

Operational Deployment

Most RAF servicewomen will be fully upgraded following their return to work medical. Although medically fit to deploy, the RAF Executive supports you positively returning to work with an 18-month¹ screening from operational deployment (from birth of child). You may choose to deploy before this time on discussion with Caree Manager.

Breastfeeding

The RAF are committed to supporting returning individuals to continue to breastfeed. However, breastfeeding may restrict your employment in some physically demanding roles, requiring some women to remain medically downgraded for a further period on return to work. If applicable, this will be discussed at your return to work medical with your MO.

Your workplace is required to provide a suitable location in which to breastfeed, express and store milk and this cannot be a toilet facility. You **must** discuss any intentions to breastfeed with your Line Manager before returning to work. This will give your workplace time to ensure the necessary facilities are provided. The MoD Breastfeeding Policy, Breastfeeding Plan and a list of breastfeeding rooms can be found [here](#).

On return to work, breastfeeding individuals may find that their supply lowers in response to the changing

feeding routine and hormone levels and they may find that they become tearful and upset more easily. It is likely to settle with time. If the symptoms do not improve, please seek help. There is a higher risk of mastitis during this time so ensure to also monitor your breasts.

Physical Health

Returning to physical fitness following childbirth has many positive physical and mental health benefits. It is usually safe to begin building back up to physical activity following your 6-week postnatal check, even if breastfeeding.

However, for some individuals, the birthing process leads to physical changes in their body that they find distressing or are embarrassed about. These changes can include but are not limited to; diastasis recti (gap between the abdominal muscles), reduced pelvic floor tone, vaginal prolapse or incontinence (unable to hold their urine or stool). Please seek help for these problems as they can be treated.

There are specialist physio's and exercise rehab instructors who can assess and help improve these symptoms. Some PTI's hold a pre and postnatal qualification and can provide an individualised back to fitness programme for after pregnancy. If there is no one

qualified at your unit, they will be able to direct you to the nearest qualified PTI.

RAF Fitness Test

The RAF Executive provide a 6-month exemption from fitness testing from the end of your maternity leave (this does not include any annual leave added onto the end of maternity leave) to enable you to return to the level of fitness required for your role and receive any support needed from PTIs qualified for postnatal fitness. This is an administrative exemption applied by your HR Centre and Unit PTIs. It is no longer administered using a medical downgrade. If medically required, additional periods of exemption will be provided.

Useful contact details for you and your healthcare professionals



Who?

Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC) (24/7 line)
01452 519951

Station Welfare Officer:

CoC contact details:

RAF Benevolent Fund
www.rafbf.org
0300 1021919

SSAFA
Telephone: 03000 111 723
Email: psswsRAF@ssafa.org.uk

MyRAF

When?

If a partner is deployed and there is an urgent need to reach them.

Deployed Partners Details

Name:
Service Number:
Location:

For assistance with any Welfare queries such as housing, finances or social concerns.

They have a range of emotional and practical support including membership of Headspace online mindfulness app, Listening and Counselling Service and relationship support.

For assistance with any Welfare queries such as housing, finances or social concerns. SSAFA also provides a confidential Personal Support and Social Work Service on every unit for RAF Personnel.

Access to parenting pack, health and wellbeing information, pay slips and many other resources – all available from your personal electronic device.

Who?

Togetherall

HeadFit

[MIND England](#)
[MMHS Scotland](#)
[BHSCT N Ireland](#)

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org
116 123

NHS 111, option 2

Refuge
www.refuge.org.uk
Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 2000 247

Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline
www.sdafmh.org.uk
0800 027 1234

Respect UK
www.respect.uk.net
info@respectphoneline.org.uk
0808 8024040

When?

A community of members, who support, help each other, and share what's troubling them in a safe, anonymous environment. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. You can find support simply by logging on.

Online resources to maintain your mental wellness, including stress busting exercises and advice.

Mental Health Charity.

Someone to talk to if things are getting to you.

If you feel you are in a mental health crisis.

If you have concerns about domestic abuse for yourself or someone else.

Scotland's domestic abuse and forced marriage helpline.

For advice and support for personnel affected by domestic abuse, either those who are concerned they need help to control their behaviour or those who need help with someone else's behaviour.



Useful contact details for you and your healthcare professionals (continued)

Who?

The Miscarriage Association

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Tel: 01924 200799

info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk.

SANDS

www.sands.org.uk

0808164332

Helpline@sands.org.uk

Defence Breast Feeding Network

Lactation Consultants of Great Britain

www.lcgb.org/find-an-ibclc

Cry-sis

08451 228669

www.cry-sis.org.uk

When?

Miscarriage is never easy. If you've been affected by miscarriage, molar pregnancy or ectopic pregnancy, the miscarriage association aim to provide the support and information needed.

Dedicated to providing emotional support and information right from the early hours after a baby's death, through to the weeks, months, and years ahead. Sands support **anyone** affected by the death of a baby.

Facebook group – who aim to support servicewomen breastfeeding, pregnant servicewomen aiming to breastfeed, and also support SP's partners who are breastfeeding or aiming to breastfeed.

International board-certified lactation consultants and highly qualified breastfeeding clinicians who help parents and babies to breastfeed. They help with both basic and complex breastfeeding challenges.

Support for parents with babies who cry excessively or have sleeping problems.

Who?

Search Defence Connect or Facebook for: **'Support Group for RAF parents returning to work'**

Email:

Air-ParentSupportNetwork@mod.gov.uk

When?

Peer support via defence connect, helping to put parents in touch with other like-minded people on station when returning to work. Accessible from the beginning of the parental journey and provide support throughout pregnancy, parental leave and return to work.