

# FMLA Management for Healthcare Organizations

An HR Guide to Modernizing Your  
Leave Processes and Programs



# Contents

Introduction	1
Requesting FMLA Leave	2
Calculating Eligibility and Entitlements	3
Sending the Initial Packet	5
Reviewing the Medical Certification	6
Approving or Denying Leave	7
Case Management	7
Managing Intermittent Leave and Reduced Schedules	8
Supporting the Return to Work	10
Conclusion	12



## Introduction

Managing leave requests covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) can be a complex, time-consuming process in any industry. It turns into an even bigger challenge in healthcare, where employees out on leave must be replaced with equally skilled professionals to maintain staffing ratios and quality of care.

Before leave managers can begin to tackle what happens once an employee departs for a leave of absence, there's a series of steps they must take to determine whether an employee is eligible for leave, to administer the time off, and to prepare for the employee's eventual return to work.

This process is complex. It's also important to get right. Organizations are of course obligated to administer leave in a way that's compliant with federal law. But there are reasons beyond compliance that should motivate employers to offer a smooth leave process.

The leave administration process colors the entire leave experience. According to an AbsenceSoft report, a clear, understandable leave process was the second-highest ranking factor behind a positive leave experience. A confusing or unclear process was also a top culprit behind a poor leave experience.<sup>1</sup>

With leave requests increasing across the healthcare industry, now is the time to improve your leave process.<sup>2</sup> In this guide, we'll review the FMLA management process and share the best practices we've collected from helping numerous healthcare organizations streamline and optimize their leave management. Most importantly, we'll show you how to use technology to improve the process for both yourself and your employees, so they can focus on providing the best patient care.

## Requesting FMLA Leave

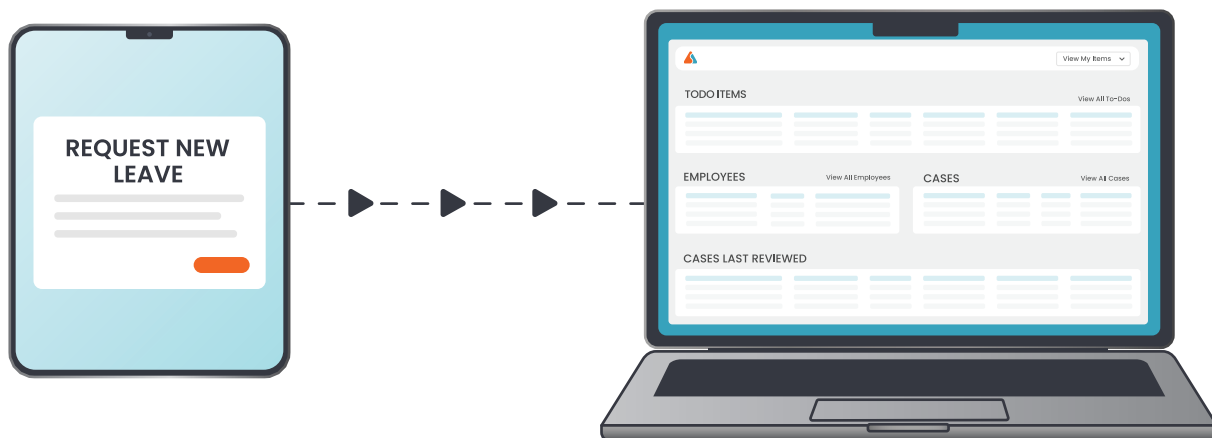
The FMLA process begins with a leave request. Without leave technology, this request kicks off a long string of communications that leave managers must handle manually. From back-and-forth messages, emails, and phone calls, a leave manager must ascertain:

- ▶ Why an employee needs leave
- ▶ What kind of leave they qualify for
- ▶ How long they may be away
- ▶ How they should be contacted

Once the leave manager has received these details, it's time to keep them organized. Many healthcare organizations track this information with a tool they already have, like an HRIS or a payroll system. Certainly, these tools are helpful — they're much better at tracking leave than sticky notes and spreadsheets. But they also lack a lot of capabilities that only purpose-built leave platforms can offer.

Leave management software like AbsenceSoft streamlines leave requests. AbsenceSoft provides busy healthcare workers a self-service portal where they can request FMLA by completing a few easy steps. The portal is web-based and mobile friendly, which means that employees can request leave whenever and wherever it's convenient.

This feature is crucial in the healthcare environment, where workers are away from computers and on the go. Self-service portals also allow shift workers to request leave any time, even when HR is off the clock. Front-line managers and supervisors can also use the portal to see the leave requested and the worker's eligibility, all without having to contact HR. This allows them to look for similarly experienced and skilled replacement workers right away.



## Calculating Eligibility and Entitlements

There are numerous calculations that go into determining whether an employee is eligible for FMLA leave. The U.S. Department of Labor — the agency that enforces the FMLA — holds that employees must meet a few requirements to gain eligibility. To be eligible, employees must:

- ✓ **Work for a covered employer:** Public- and private-sector employers that employ “50 or more employees in 20 or more workweeks in the current or previous calendar year” must comply with the FMLA’s provisions according to DOL.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ **Satisfy the 50/75 rule:** Employees must work at a location where 50 employees work for an employer within 75 miles.
- ✓ **Have 12 months of service:** Employees qualify for FMLA leave once they’ve worked for their employer for 12 months. Employees also need to have worked 1,250 hours within 12 months prior to the time of their leave to be eligible.
- ✓ **Have a qualifying reason for leave:** The FMLA exists for workers to take leave for family or medical issues, from the birth of a child to a parent facing a serious health condition.

Determining FMLA eligibility in a healthcare setting is a complicated task. Even with the simpler eligibility factors, like hours accrued, leave managers must carefully consider employees who work complicated schedules that span multiple locations.

There are also more complex requirements to consider, like the 50/75 rule. Consider a nurse who works for a small urgent care that’s an affiliate of a larger hospital system. If the hospital employs more than 50 people within 75 miles of the urgent care — the nurse’s job site — then the nurse would satisfy the 50/75 rule. If the hospital employs fewer than 50 people within 75 miles of the urgent care, the nurse would not qualify for FMLA — even if the employee met the other requirements.

Dealing with the 50/75 rule is even more complicated when leave managers begin considering employees who telework. Healthcare organizations must determine how remote workers in administrative roles factor into eligibility calculations.



### Policy

### Eligible

Family Medical Leave Act	Yes
Oregon Family Leave-Pregnancy/Maternity	Yes
Oregon Paid Leave - Job Protection	Yes
Oregon Family Leave	Yes
ABC Company Parental Leave	Yes



### Policy

### Eligible

Family Medical Leave Act	No
Maine Family Leave-Pregnancy/Maternity	No
Maine Paid Leave - Job Protection	No
Maine Family Leave	No
ABC Company Parental Leave	Yes

Leave software equips healthcare employers with the tools they need to make complex leave calculations with accuracy and ease. In just a few seconds, the system can automatically calculate FMLA eligibility for each unique case.

The best leave platforms integrate with existing systems to give users a full picture of eligibility. AbsenceSoft integrates with:



**HRIS and HCM**, so you know who is on leave, who is returning to work, and date details for each leave of absence.



**Single Sign-On (SSO) services**, so employees get streamlined access to request and track their leave.



**Time and attendance systems**, so you can see which employees are actively on leave.



**Payroll systems**, so you know if an employee's leave should be paid or unpaid.

Purpose-built leave management software can also account for complex leave scenarios, like intermittent leave and reduced schedules, which we will discuss in more detail later. It can also assist in instances where FMLA leave is provided and then extended as an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA), and other leave-adjacent laws.

More than half of healthcare leaders in a recent survey have reported challenges with employee stress and burnout in a recent survey.<sup>4</sup> The ADA often considers mental health conditions as disabilities, which means employers can be required to provide related accommodations, including leave. Modern leave technology makes managing these intersecting laws much easier, ensuring your organization stays both compliant and compassionate.

## Sending the Initial Packet

Once an employee makes an FMLA request, the employer must follow up by sending the employee a notice of eligibility, along with a rights and responsibilities notice. According to DOL, the packet must:

- ✓ Be sent within five business days of the initial request.
- ✓ Be provided in a language the employee can read.
- ✓ Inform the employee of their eligibility status.
- ✓ Tell the employee at least one reason why they are not eligible, should they fail to qualify.<sup>5</sup>

Depending on what type of leave is being requested, your state may require you to send additional forms and notices within a certain time frame as well.

Federal and state regulations have rules about when forms and other information should be sent, and complying with all of them is not always easy. You need to be sure each employee requesting leave receives the right information, and that you are able to document what you sent

**Case:**

**Requested Leave:**

**Send by:** ☒ Email ☐ Text ☐ Print/Mail

**To:**

**Subject:**

{Company Name}  
{Company Address}

{Employee Name}  
{Employee Address}

### Attachments

- ☒ Authorization to Release Medical Information
- ☒ Certification for FMLA Employee Health Condition
- ☒ Employee Rights and Responsibilities under FMLA

and when. With state laws changing more frequently, you have to make sure you are sending the most up-to-date forms to stay compliant.

The AbsenceSoft platform provides up-to-date, compliant forms that are ready to send in seconds. The platform offers multiple templates that you can customize with the branding for various sites within your organization. As your caseloads grow, this technology will help you keep up with leave requests while remaining effective and compliant.





## Reviewing the Medical Certification

Once the packet is sent out, employees must complete the information and return it within 15 days. In large organizations, leave managers send, track, and receive certifications at a high volume. It's a big job that requires a high degree of management, coordination, and effort.

Leave management software alleviates the administrative burden that comes with these steps. It tracks the due dates for each case and provides custom, automated reminders for leave managers and employees alike. It also allows employees to add their documents through the self-service portal from any device, at any time. Employees can take photos of their documents and upload them from their phone — an important feature for deskless healthcare workers.

When employees return their certification documents, leave managers should thoroughly review the information to make sure it is complete and accurate. This can include following up to make sure doctors and other providers are valid, and that they have fully completed all of the necessary forms.

**A centralized system is key to keeping this step simple, efficient, and compliant.**

The AbsenceSoft platform makes the most complicated cases trackable and audit-ready. It also offers users the ability to “attach” faxed documents to a case with barcode scanning.



## Approving or Denying Leave

So far, the leave management process has focused on gathering information. Arriving at this step means it's time to make a decision and approve or deny the leave.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of this step. Leave decisions must be made based on the information gathered earlier in the process. A misstep at this stage can lead to confusion, frustration, or even legal action.

These risks point to the importance of leave decisions that are consistent over

time — a difficult task for employers with large, complex workforces. Platforms like AbsenceSoft makes sure leave is approved or denied with consistency across locations, employee levels, and departments. The platform's reporting function helps ensure that similarly situated employees receive similar decisions regarding their leave.

The software also sends leave managers automated reminders and alerts to make sure they send approvals or denials within five days to comply with federal law.

## Case Management

FMLA case management involves a lot of tracking. For each case, leave managers need to know when the leave starts, when certifications expire, and when leave banks are exhausted. When leave managers are tasked with hundreds of cases to manage, the details they must track multiply exponentially.

Healthcare leave management teams, which often serve hundreds or thousands of employees, need a modern solution for

case management. A purpose-built leave platform like AbsenceSoft makes case management:

- ✓ **More efficient:** AbsenceSoft eliminates time consuming tasks with automation.
- ✓ **More streamlined:** Our platform provides to-do lists for leave managers each morning.
- ✓ **More collaborative:** Case reassignment is easy with our centralized system.

When tools make case management easier, leave managers can take on more—and still have more time to spend supporting their coworkers. When one national healthcare provider added AbsenceSoft to its tech stack, its leave

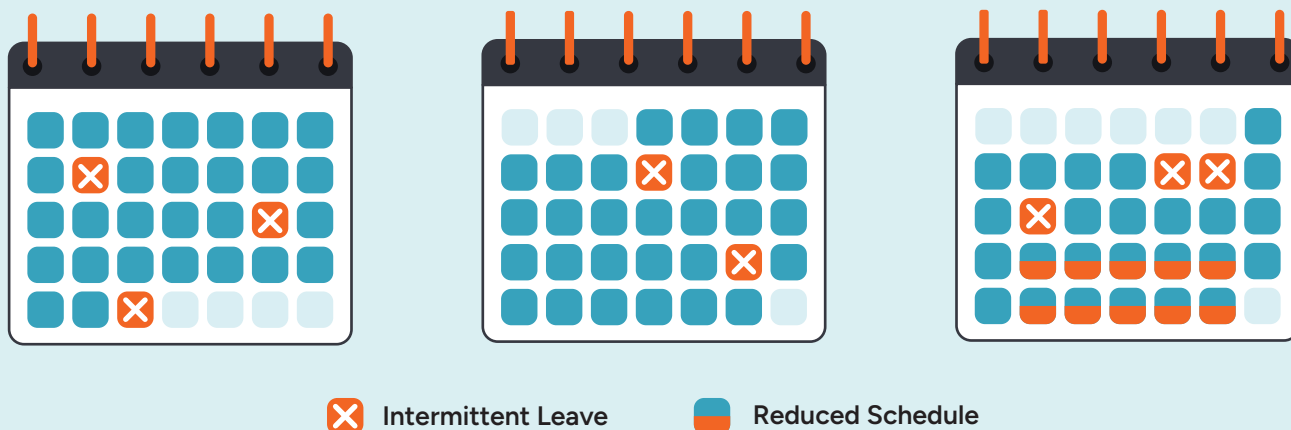
management team was able to manage a total of 3,084 cases in its first year with the platform. Each team member manages about 685 cases annually — **a 174% increase from their previous workload.**<sup>6</sup>

## Managing Intermittent Leave and Reduced Schedules

The FMLA covers ongoing conditions like migraines, asthma, and arthritis. It allows employees to take leave to address conditions like these in small, unplanned increments, known as intermittent leave. Managing and tracking intermittent leave is challenging because it's unpredictable by nature.

In healthcare, intermittent leave is a particularly difficult challenge.

Because operations are constant and staffing ratios must be maintained, leave managers must be able to temporarily back fill roles left open by intermittent leave as soon as they know of a worker's absence. The replacements they find must bring similar skills and credentials, requirements that make this challenge even more intense.

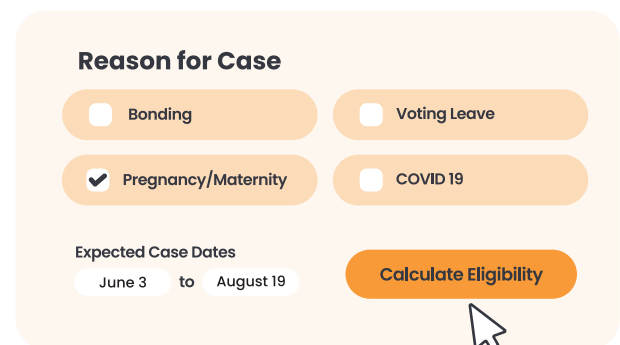


How can healthcare leave teams make intermittent leave more manageable? Technology.

AbsenceSoft offers several features that greatly reduce the challenges associated with intermittent leave. These features include:

- ✓ A centralized system where leave managers can track time taken against an approved time bank, alongside real-time eligibility calculations and certification details.
- ✓ An eligibility calculator configured to account for multiple job locations, job codes, and other data, partnered with a system that provides alternative leave options.
- ✓ An employee self-service portal where workers can submit intermittent leave requests that alert important parties right away, making schedules transparent so staffing requirements can be met.
- ✓ Automated reminders that alert leave managers to soon-to-expire certifications and automatically recertify leaves.

These features also equip leave managers to handle employees who use FMLA leave to reduce their work schedule for medical reasons. Employees may qualify for flexible scheduling, temporary reassignment, or a reduced workload under the FMLA. With a platform like AbsenceSoft, reduced schedules are easier to manage. It provides insight into even the most complicated details, like how much of a reduced schedule is paid and how much of it is unpaid, job protected leave under the FMLA.



The screenshot shows a web interface for calculating FMLA eligibility. It features a section titled "Reason for Case" with four radio button options: "Bonding", "Voting Leave", "Pregnancy/Maternity" (which is selected), and "COVID 19". Below this, there is a field for "Expected Case Dates" showing "June 3" to "August 19". A prominent orange button labeled "Calculate Eligibility" is positioned to the right, with a mouse cursor hovering over it.



## Supporting the Employee's Return to Work

The leave management process isn't over once a worker's leave expires. Providing a positive return-to-work experience is essential, especially in an industry that suffers from high turnover rates.

In a recent survey, AbsenceSoft asked healthcare employees who had recently taken a leave of absence about their experiences. Positive leave experiences improved loyalty, productivity, and a sense of belonging. However, negative leave experiences had an outsized, direct impact on retention. Of the healthcare employees who reported a negative leave and return-to-work experience, 46% decided to look for a new job or didn't come back to work.<sup>7</sup>

Leave and accommodations management software enables HR professionals to automate and streamline many of the tasks associated with an employee's return to work. From notifying managers to updating critical systems, leave managers get the tools they need to save time, reduce errors, and improve retention.

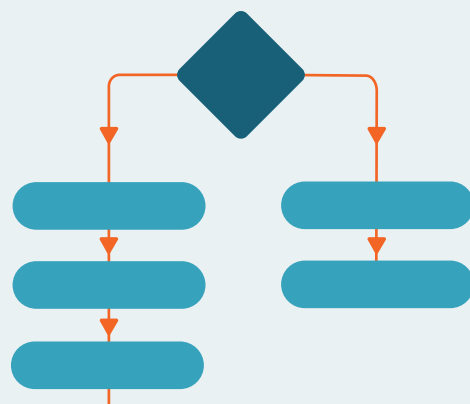
How can leave teams make sure the return-to-work experience they're providing is a positive one? AbsenceSoft's in-house compliance experts have captured the best practices for return to work in a [step-by-step checklist](#) that you can use to begin improving your program.



Consider how technology streamlines one of the most error-ridden steps of return to work: fitness for duty certification. According to the Labor Department, an employee may be required to provide a fitness for duty certification from a healthcare provider that shows the employee can resume work. A purpose-built leave platform can enable this process by:

- ✓ Sending communications about the certification as the leave is coming to a close.
- ✓ Customizing workflows to make sure fitness for duty requirements are met and tracked.
- ✓ Implementing an EEOC-compliant interactive process to determine whether accommodations are needed.
- ✓ Recording and storing medical releases and other important documents in one central, secure location.

### Workflow | Fitness for Duty



### Accommodation Interactive Process

<div></div>	Yes No N/A
<div></div>	Yes No N/A
<div></div>	Yes No N/A
<div></div>	Yes No N/A

### Case: Family Health Condition 1557208



Case Attachments


Select Files

Date	Description	File Name
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<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

## Conclusion

When you look at the entire process for managing FMLA leave requests, it involves many steps, verifications, and communications. Nothing is cut and dry, and it's important to take action with total accuracy. With leave requests on the rise, it's no surprise that many healthcare leave management teams are getting overwhelmed.

It doesn't have to be that way. By automating the FMLA process into a workflow in AbsenceSoft, leave managers can simplify, streamline, and optimize nearly all of the tasks involved. By spending 66% less time on FMLA management tasks, leave managers can focus on what's most important: caring for their employees.



To learn how software can transform your FMLA management, we invite you to schedule a demo of AbsenceSoft at [absencesoft.com](https://absencesoft.com).