
Time Away from Sports Medicine Fellowship/ Family Medical Leave Policy for Board Eligibility

**Updated May 2026 to provide clarity about leave types and parameters to become board-eligible at the end of fellowship training as it pertains to each of the primary certification boards.*

Background and Purpose

In an effort to standardize family medical leave for sports medicine training programs, the Sports Medicine Advisory Committee revision to the Time Away from Fellowship/ Family Medical Leave policy distinguishes parental or family and medical leave from other types of leave (vacation, holiday, Academic, PTO, etc.) and provides a more supportive policy for fellows during periods in which more prolonged leave is needed.

The Sports Medicine Advisory Committee policy is only intended to address maximum time away from training that is allowable for a fellow to become board-eligible at the end of their training, after receiving Program Director sign off. Local policies regarding time away from training may be different than what is described here. **This policy does not override sponsoring institution or fellowship program human resources (HR) and training policies, which will continue to operate at the local level as the primary source of allowable time away from training.** Similarly, it should not be confused with leave permitted by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). These policies should be clearly written and communicated to both prospective and current fellows.

Additionally, this policy is not intended to prescribe program-level decisions regarding the timing of graduation for any individual fellow, which continue to be based on meeting Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) requirements and achieving the competencies necessary for a fellow to be deemed ready for autonomous practice. At any point, a Fellowship Program Director and the Clinical Competency Committee (CCC) can decide to extend a fellow's training based on their assessment that the fellow has not met ACGME requirements to enter autonomous practice.

Principles Utilized in Consideration of the Updated Policy

In considering an update to the policy, the following principles were adopted by the Sports Medicine Advisory Committee to guide its decisions:

1. The Sports Medicine Advisory Committee will support fellows as they add to their families and as they attend major personal and family health events.

2. While time away from training should be allowed, decisions about whether the fellow has met the ACGME and/or Competency Based Board Eligibility (CBBE) requirements to enter autonomous practice will continue to be determined by the Fellowship Program Director, Clinical Competency Committee, and the sponsoring institution.
3. Other leave times, such as allowable vacation days, may be used toward allocation of time away for Family Leave.
4. The American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) is the administrative board of the Sports Medicine Certification. It conducts the certification Examination and Sports Medicine Longitudinal Assessment and executes on behalf of direction provided by the Sports Medicine Advisory Committee. ABFM is committed to maintaining two examination cycles per year to permit timely achievement of certification for fellows who need an extension of training or who are off cycle for any reason.

Fellowship Training Requirements for Board Certification Eligibility

Candidates for Sports Medicine board eligibility are required to be board certified in emergency medicine from the American Board of Emergency Medicine (ABEM), in family medicine from the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM), in internal medicine from the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM), in pediatrics from the American Board of Pediatrics (ABP), or in physical medicine and rehabilitation from the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (ABPMR), plus successful completion in a 12-month ACGME-accredited sports medicine program.

Currently, six (6) weeks of family medical leave is an ACGME requirement with a minimum of one (1)-week paid time off (PTO) for use outside of the first six (6) weeks of approved family medical leave. However, given the limited 12-month window to complete the robust Sports Medicine Fellowship Training curriculum, fellows who require leave during training will be limited to the following based on their primary certifying board:

- **ABEM, ABFM, ABIM, and ABPMR:** Physicians whose primary certification is in Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, or Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation will be limited to six (6) weeks away from training during the 12-month Sports Medicine Fellowship.
- **ABP:** To maintain consistency across the portfolio of pediatric certifications, physicians whose primary certification is in Pediatrics will be limited to four (4) weeks away from training during the 12-month Sports Medicine Fellowship

The total of allowable leave must include any paid time off (PTO) as well.

Additional leave beyond the approved allotment by each certifying board will require the fellowship training program to be extended. This extension ensures adequate training for the fellow to graduate from the program and is a requirement to be eligible for board certification.

*For example, if an **Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, or Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation** fellow took three (3) weeks of paid time off and six (6) weeks for*

parental leave, this nine (9)-weeks cumulative leave would exceed the six (6)-week leave period and the fellowship would need to be extended by a minimum of three (3) weeks to close this gap.

*If a **Pediatrics** fellow took three (3) weeks of paid time off and six (6) weeks for parental leave, this nine (9)-weeks cumulative leave would exceed the four (4)-week leave period and the fellowship would need to be extended by a minimum of five (5) weeks to close this gap.*

1. The Fellowship Program Director, on behalf of the Clinical Competency Committee, must certify that the fellow is ready for autonomous practice.
2. The local Graduate Medical Education (GME) program may have additional standards for family medical leave. While these extended benefits may help protect the trainee's position and funding if needed, the Committee recognized that there is a short period of time in a one-year training fellowship to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to meet the minimum standard for fellowship training and the training period.

Sports Medicine candidates whose primary certification is issued through ABEM, ABFM, ABIM, and ABPMR must complete (at minimum) 46 weeks of training in an ACGME-accredited sports medicine fellowship program.

- *Example 1:* If the **Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, or Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation** fellow has taken more than six (6) weeks of leave, the fellowship training period would need to be (at minimum) extended to meet the 46-week requirement. Additional time beyond 46 weeks can be added at the discretion of the Fellowship Program Director to ensure the candidate is capable of practicing autonomously at the completion of fellowship training.
- *Example 2:* The fellowship training period can be extended even if an **Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, or Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation fellow** has met the minimum of 46 weeks to achieve board eligibility. The Fellowship Program Director and the Clinical Competency Committee can determine missed time has resulted in insufficient training to deem the candidate capable of practicing autonomously at the completion of fellowship training.

To be consistent across all pediatric certifications, Sports Medicine candidates whose primary certification is issued through ABP must complete (at minimum) 48 weeks of training in an ACGME-accredited sports medicine fellowship program.

- *Example 1:* If the **Pediatric fellow** has taken more than four (4) weeks of leave, the fellowship training period would need to be (at minimum) extended to meet the 48-week requirement. Additional time beyond 48 weeks can be added at the discretion of the Fellowship Program Director to ensure the candidate is capable of practicing autonomously at the completion of fellowship training.

- *Example 2:* The fellowship training period can be extended even if a **Pediatric fellow** has met the minimum of 48 weeks to achieve board eligibility. The Fellowship Program Director and the Clinical Competency Committee can determine missed time has resulted in insufficient training to deem the candidate capable of practicing autonomously at the completion of fellowship training.

Extensions of training time should be completed as an extension of their current sports medicine fellowship program.

At the end of training, the Fellowship Program Director is expected to verify completion of Sports Medicine Fellowship training, on behalf of the Clinical Competency Committee, attesting that the candidate has met all requirements for board-eligibility and is ready for autonomous practice.

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy:

1. “Training” will also be referred to as 12-month ACGME-accredited Sports Medicine Fellowship.
2. “Time Away from Training” represents two types of absences from Sports Medicine Fellowship training:
 - 2.1 “Family Medical Leave” refers to a Leave of Absence from the Sports Medicine Fellowship program to support fellows during the following:
 - i. The birth and care of a newborn, adopted, or foster child, including for both birth- and non-birth parents of a newborn.
 - ii. The care of a family memberⁱ with a serious health condition, including end of life care.
 - iii. A fellow’s own serious health condition that requires prolonged evaluation and/or treatment.
 - 2.2 “Other Leave” refers to time off allotted by fellowship programs and their sponsoring institutions for vacation, holiday, educational leave, or other paid time off.

Policy Parameters

Family Leave should be used only for time when fellows add to their family, need to care for a family member with a serious health condition, or must manage their own serious health condition. Family medical leave may not be used for remediation or failure to meet academic, clinical or professionalism performance standards.

The Sports Medicine Advisory Committee does not require pre-approval for a fellow’s Family Leave if it is taken as outlined, and as long as the fellow is on schedule to meet other training requirements. However, the Sports Medicine Advisory Committee still requires that Family Leave or other leave of absence is reported even when extension of training is not required, to allow for data tracking that supports ongoing evaluation of this policy change.

Certification Timeline in Instances of Extension of Fellowship Training

If a fellow's total leave exceeds the allowable limit of their primary certifying board within the 12-month training period, extension of the candidate's fellowship training will be necessary to cover the duration of time they were away from the program in excess of the policy. In this instance, Fellowship Program Directors will be accountable for ensuring the number of total days missed below the minimum threshold of 46 weeks (ABEM, ABFM, ABIM, and ABPMR) or 48 weeks (ABP) are reflected in the plan for resuming training and as basis for calculating a new graduation date.

Candidates may sit for the examination before completion of training if the Fellowship Program Director indicates the fellow will complete training within the immediate three (3) calendar months following the exam; however, certification is not granted until training has been verified.

¹ *Decisions about what constitutes family member and what constitutes serious health condition is best left to the Fellowship Program Director and their institutional policies. The Sports Medicine Advisory Committee intends to leave those decisions at the local level where they are best able to be individually made.*