

Hazards to New and Expectant Mothers

Definition

The Health and Safety Executive define "new or expectant mother" as an employee who is pregnant, who has given birth within the previous six months, or who is breastfeeding.

Introduction

This guidance provides information for both individuals and managers to assist in ensuring the health and safety of new and expectant mothers.

It is important to remember that pregnancy is a part of everyday life and should not be regarded as ill health. The majority of health and safety issues relating to new and expectant mothers can be addressed by good health and safety management procedures.

The University has an obligation to assess any risks to health and safety in the workplace and possible adverse effects on pregnant or breastfeeding staff and their children, including the unborn, and to take appropriate action. This may include offering a temporary variation in duties, working hours or working conditions.

Some hazards have the potential to increase the risk to new and expectant mothers and therefore once a woman informs her School / manager that she is pregnant, the relevant work activities must be re-assessed and modification or alterations made when and where appropriate.

Manual Handling

- Hormonal changes may affect ligaments making them more susceptible to injury.
- Postural and dexterity problems increase as the pregnancy develops due to increased size.
- Re-assess the risks with regard to manual handling
- Look to avoid or reduce manual handling tasks undertaken by new and expectant mothers

Work with Display Screen Equipment

Work with display screen equipment does not cause any particular risks to new or expectant mothers, although there are a number of factors which need to be considered:

- Sitting for long periods of time should be avoided, break up your work to get up and move about regularly.

- As the pregnancy develops and the expectant mother increases in size, posture and mobility issues may cause discomfort.
- Make sure there is sufficient space to move at the workstation
- Back pain is common in pregnancy, so ensure good posture. The University's Furniture Office can advise on lumbar support if necessary.
- Continuous Standing / Sitting
- Standing for long periods may lead to dizziness, faintness and fatigue.
- Standing or sitting for long periods should be avoided.
- Consider a change in the work pattern and/or introduce more frequent breaks to enable new and expectant mothers to move about.

Chemicals

Re-assess relevant COSHH assessments taking into account the specific risk phrases noted below.

- Work with substances which may present a risk to the mother and/or child must be avoided – remove the mother from specific high risk activities as appropriate.
- Refer to relevant Risk Phrases for guidance (see below)

Discuss general health concerns with the Occupational Health Unit.

Risk Phrases

Risk Phrases have recently been replaced by Hazard Statements (see <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/health-safety/guidance/hazardous-substances/ghs-clp> for more information).

If you use or may be exposed to chemicals, the most relevant hazard statements to look out for are noted below (old risk phrases in brackets):-

- **H370** Causes damage to organs (R39 – Danger of very serious irreversible effects)
- **H351** Suspected of causing cancer (R40 - Limited evidence of carcinogenic effects)
- **H350** May cause cancer (R45 - May cause cancer)
- **H340** May cause genetic defects (R46 - may cause heritable genetic damage)
- **H350i** May cause cancer (inhalation) (R49 - May cause cancer by inhalation)

- **H360** May damage fertility or the unborn child (R61 - May cause harm to the unborn child)
- **H361** Suspected of damaging fertility or the unborn child (R63 - Possible risk of harm to the unborn child)
- **H362** May cause harm to breast-fed children (R64 - May cause harm to breast-fed babies)
- **H371** May cause damage to organs and **H341** Suspected of causing genetic defects (R68 - Possible risk of irreversible effects)

The Health and Safety Executive publish a list of risk phrases, available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/chip/phrases.htm>

Biological Materials including micro-organisms / GM work

Re-assess relevant risk assessments.

- Consider risks associated with chemo-therapeutic agents used to treat any laboratory acquired infection which may occur.
- Work with biological materials which may present a significant risk to the mother and/or child must be avoided – remove the mother from specific high risk activities as appropriate.
- Discuss specific issues with the local Biological Safety Adviser and/or University Biological Safety Adviser
- Discuss general health concerns with the Occupational Health Unit.
- Discuss vaccination issues with the Occupational Health Unit or G.P.
- Refer to the [ACDP Guidance 'Infection Risks to New and Expectant Mothers in the Workplace - A Guide for Employers, 1997'.\(pdf file\)](#)

Radiation

- Refer to [Radiation Protection Code of Practice 013: Working with Radiation When Pregnant or Breastfeeding](#) - before re-assessing relevant risk assessments for work with radiation
- Work with radiation which may present a significant risk to the mother and/or child must be avoided – remove the mother from specific high risk activities for the duration of the pregnancy if appropriate.
- Discuss specific issues with the local Radiation Protection Supervisor and/or University Radiation Protection Adviser
- Discuss general health concerns with the Occupational Health Unit.

Work with Animals

This section is mainly of relevance to those working in the small and large animal hospitals and those working outdoors.

Re-assess relevant risk assessments for work with animals.

- Cats:
 - Pregnant women should avoid coming into contact with cats faeces due to the risk of toxoplasmosis.
 - The emptying of cat litter trays should be avoided if possible. If this can not be avoided then disposable rubber gloves should be worn and hands washed thoroughly afterwards.
 - Wash hands thoroughly after handling cats
- Sheep:
 - Pregnant women should avoid coming into contact with pregnant or milking ewes and any newborn lambs as sheep may carry toxoplasmosis, listeriosis or chlamydia organisms.

Lone / Out-of-Hours Work

- Re-assess relevant risk assessments for lone and / or out of hours work
- Special consideration may require to be given to employees who work at night. Where an employee works night and produces a medical certificate indicating that it is necessary for the individual not to work nights, then night work must be suspended for the period of time identified in the medical certificate and alternative daytime work should be offered. For further guidance on this issue refer to Human Resources.

Travel

- Travel may require to be minimised
- Foreign travel may require a medical certificate from a G.P.
- Foreign travel after 36 weeks is generally restricted and you may need to seek further advice from the travel company, and / or travel insurers.
- Discuss vaccination issues with the Occupational Health Unit or G.P.
- Where travel to / from work can be flexible pregnant mothers may prefer to avoid rush hour traffic in order to reduce travelling time, obtain seats on public transport, etc.

Fatigue / Discomfort / Stress

- Exposure to nauseating smells such as cooking or chemical odours may increase "morning sickness", therefore you may need to consider avoiding or restricting exposure to certain areas / activities, for a limited time period where feasible.
- Expectant mothers are likely to require more frequent visits to the toilet and this must be taken into consideration with respect to the work pattern, access to toilets, etc.
- Exposure to very high / low temperatures may cause additional discomfort and consideration may require to be given to avoiding or minimising exposure to certain areas / activities.
- As the expectant mother increases in size consideration will require to be given to a number of issues relating to comfort, dexterity, etc such as work in work in awkward, restricted or confined areas.
- As the expectant mother increases in size consideration may also require to be given to the suitability of clothing - uniforms, personal protective equipment (PPE), etc.
- There may be some potential problems with regard to the expectant mother getting to her place of work, especially in the later stages of the pregnancy. An expectant mother may have difficulty climbing stairs as the pregnancy develops, and in buildings where there is no working lift consideration may require to be given to relocating the worker to a lower floor, or allowing the expectant mother to work from home if appropriate, for a limited period of time.

Facilities

New and expectant mothers must be provided with access to somewhere to rest, breastfeed or express milk. This room should be private such as a first aid room, where available, or a private office or room.

New and expectant mothers must be provided with access to toilets and hand-basins. Restricted access to toilet facilities can increase the risk of infection and kidney disease.

Sources of external guidance and advice

External Guidance

- [Active Living: Keep active during and after pregnancy](#) - Health Scotland
- [Breast Changes During and After Pregnancy \(pdf\)](#) - Breast Cancer Care
- [Breastfeeding in Scotland](#)

Produced by the Health and Safety Department, the University of Edinburgh

- [Health and Safety for New and Expectant Mothers](#) - Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
- [National Childbirth Trust](#)
- [New and Expectant Mothers](#) - Safe and Healthy Working
- [Working Families](#)
- [Work and Families](#) - Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)