



## 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.

### Risk Assessment

#### Risk Assessment Requirements

There is a legal requirement to assess the risks specific to new and expectant mothers. Further guidance and advice on this is available below.

The University has a robust system in place to ensure Schools carry out risk assessments and these assessments should already highlight any risks (biological, chemical or physical) specific to women of child bearing age and to pregnant women. The majority of health and safety issues relating to women of child bearing age and to pregnant women should therefore already be addressed by good health and safety management procedures.

When a woman notifies her School that she is pregnant, or has given birth in the previous six months, the School must review all the applicable risk assessments to ensure that she is not at any additional risk, taking into account factors specific to the individual.

The responsibility to ensure this is carried out is noted within the University's Maternity Policy (revised 15th November 2010), available from Human Resources.

#### **This Policy states:-**

'Section 5.1 Early Notification of Pregnancy including Risk Assessment Information

Employees are encouraged to give early notification of their pregnancy to enable the University to plan ahead, and carry out necessary risk assessments.

Heads of School or Support Departments, or their nominated deputies, have responsibilities for protecting the health and safety of their employees, including those who are pregnant, those who have given birth within the previous six months and those who are breastfeeding.

Once a line manager has been informed that one of their employees is pregnant, they should arrange for a pregnant worker risk assessment to be undertaken, and also for any reasonable adjustments to be made as appropriate. This is particularly important where there are known personal or work area risks.

The Occupational Health Unit (OHU) can provide advice and guidance on health and safety implications relating to the employee and her job.'

When a woman finds out, or suspects, that she may be pregnant she should speak to her line manager and/or School/Area Safety Adviser in order to ensure that a review of risk assessments is carried out, as early as possible in the pregnancy. This will enable the woman to discuss and review the activities she is involved in and raise any concerns she may have regarding her work during her pregnancy. The woman and her manager should review the work activities as the pregnancy progresses in order to take into account any risks which may arise at different stages.

Following this review, the woman and her School, etc may decide upon temporary changes to her activities, and/or additional control measures if appropriate and these should be implemented as necessary.

Where a specific issue of concern remains, which can't be addressed by the School, etc. the Occupational Health Unit can be contacted for further guidance and advice on occupational health related matters. Human Resources should be contacted for advice on any HR issues.

### **Risk Assessment Forms**

The Health and Safety Department provide tools to assist Schools, etc to carry out risk assessments of work activities on SAFENET, the University's system of interlinking (template) self-inspection checklists, generic risk assessments and (model) risk assessment forms.

The University has put together a model risk assessment form for new and expectant mothers which can be modified by Schools and individuals as appropriate. Individuals and/ or Schools may of course prefer to use an alternative risk assessment form if they prefer.

[New and Expectant Mothers - Model Risk Assessment pdf](#)

[New and Expectant Mothers - Model Risk Assessment word](#)

### **Hazards to New and Expectant Mothers**

The following provides information on some common hazards within a University environment and how new and expectant mothers can avoid or minimise the risks. This list is not exhaustive and it is therefore important that individuals and Schools consider the risks specific to the work activities and environment relevant to new and expectant mothers.

#### **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.

### **Hazard Statements/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'

### **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 chlamydiosis 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.

### **University Policies**

Relevant University policies may be accessed via the links below. For advice on the issues raised in these policies please contact Human Resources.

- [Maternity Benefits Policy - for staff with an expected week of confinement on or after 01.04.07](#)

- [University's Maternity Support Benefit \(Family Leave Policy\)](#)

## **Notifying the Employer**

It is recommended that expectant mothers inform their line manager and/or School/Area Safety Adviser as early as possible in the pregnancy in order to ensure that a review of relevant risk assessments is carried out. It should be remembered that the first 12 weeks of the pregnancy are an important time.

There are different aspects to consider with regard to informing the employer.

"In order to qualify for maternity benefits the member of staff must notify her HR adviser and her Head of School or nominated deputy in writing, of when approximately she wants to start maternity leave, no later than 15 weeks prior to the Expected Week of Childbirth (EWC)" (Maternity Benefits Policy).

The University is legally required to assess risks to all staff including women of child bearing age and therefore most of the risks should already be adequately controlled. Expectant mothers should be aware that the University is not legally obliged to implement all legislative issues that relate to the pregnancy until they have been informed in writing that an individual is pregnant. In order to assist in the discharge of responsibilities towards the health and safety of the member of staff and unborn child, it is therefore advisable that written notification should be made at an early stage in the pregnancy.

Regardless of (1) and (2) above, there is an appreciation that many women prefer not to formally inform (in writing) their employer until later in their pregnancy.

However, in such circumstances we would advise that the new or expectant mother speaks in confidence to their line manager at an early stage in order that they can discuss and review the activities in which they are involved and raise any concerns that may pertain to the work activities during the pregnancy and after the birth. This would enable the mother and manager to review the work activities as the pregnancy progresses in order to take into account any risks which may arise at different stages.

## **Occupational Health Unit (OHU)**

New or expectant mothers and / or managers can discuss any general concerns they may have in confidence with the Occupational Health Unit.

The Occupational Health Unit is staffed by registered health practitioners and provides a confidential service, which means that personal information is treated in medical confidence. The exception to this is if the Occupational Health Practitioners are made aware of any situation which is considered to pose a significant risk to the health and safety of the mother or her child. In these exceptional circumstances the mother would be made aware of the risk and the requirement to notify her employer.

Contact details for the Occupational Health Unit are:

Tele: 50 8190

Email: [Occupational.Health@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Occupational.Health@ed.ac.uk)

## **Confidentiality**

The confidentiality concerning a women's pregnancy means an employer should not make it known to others that she is pregnant if she does not wish it to be known, or if she does not consent to it.

There may be exceptional circumstances where there is a significant risk to the health and safety of the new or expectant mother or her child where limited disclosure may be necessary although this will be done with full consultation with the new or expectant mother.

If new or expectant mothers are concerned about confidentiality they should raise this with their line manager / HR / OHU as appropriate.

## **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](#)
- [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)