

## A guide to Health and Safety at Work for Expectant and New Mothers.

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We are committed to the health and well being of new and expectant mothers. Every organisation wishes to ensure women are able to work as effectively and comfortably as possible by referring women as soon as a pregnancy is announced, to assess the need for any adjustments to their work. This support is available for both pregnant women and new mothers (i.e. pregnant or have given birth within the previous six months or are breastfeeding).

When you have confirmed that you are pregnant, tell your employer immediately, in writing. The company will want to undertake a risk assessment and introduce any practicable measures that need to be taken for your protection. During the first three months of your pregnancy you may be vulnerable to spontaneous miscarriage, so it is important that the Company is aware of your condition as soon as possible.

### **What are the risks in the workplace?**

This depends on the type of work you do and the environment in which you work. During the risk assessment, the following are likely to be considered:

#### **Work with display screen equipment.**

Display screens emit very low levels of non – ionising electromagnetic radiation. There is no risk to you or your baby from these emissions and no reason why this type of work should be stopped.

Due to a change in shape it may be necessary to re-arrange your workstation if you become cramped or find yourself having to overstretch. A work station assessment will establish what adjustments need to be made for you

It may also be beneficial to introduce more frequent short breaks to enable you to change your posture and use a footstool to relieve pressure on the backs of your legs.

#### **Shift and night work.**

There is no evidence that working shifts or nights is more of a risk during pregnancy, unless there are other difficulties being experienced that would make it advisable for you to work core days. E.g. if you are showing glucose in your urine tests.

During your pregnancy, you should try to avoid working in excess of 45 hours per week as this has been linked with a higher risk of miscarriage, but existing work considerations will be taken into account.

#### **Negative pressure**

There are a number of factors that can lead to an expectant or new mother developing a lower resilience to pressure in the workplace. In some instances, hormonal changes, may make you more prone to mood swings and your changing shape can sometimes make you feel uncomfortable and unable to sleep. If you are irritable, emotional, unsettled and tired it can make it more difficult to cope with the demands of your job.

If this is experienced, it is important that you make your manager aware of your difficulties and examine ways in which you can address the issues before they escalate.

#### **Temperature.**

Pregnancy can sometimes alter a woman's perception and response to temperature. In hot environments there may be a tendency to faint, increasing the potential for injury. So it is recommended that you wear layers that can be removed or added as appropriate during the day.

### **Noise and vibration.**

In the majority of work environments where recommended safety precautions are in existence, no extra measures need to be taken for pregnant workers. In a few instances some women may experience a raised blood pressure if exposure to noise and vibration is on-going. Reducing the duration spent in this environment without a break is usually sufficient to address the issue.

### **Lifting and handling loads.**

During pregnancy your hormone levels change causing softening of the ligaments and increasing the risk of musculoskeletal injury. You may also find it difficult to handle loads safely because of the changes in your shape as your pregnancy progresses. Although you are not expected to lift loads at work, it is appropriate to consider the activities you may undertake at home in this context.

Following a birth by Caesarean Section, it is not recommended that a mother lift loads for 3 months

### **Biological hazards.**

It is known that there are certain infections that can cause foetal damage. The most common one that is encountered is Rubella, also called German Measles. Many women are immunised against this disease when they reach child-bearing age or acquire immunity to it through having the disease itself.

You will be screened to check whether you are immune to rubella at your first antenatal visit. If you are not immune, vaccination is usually done after your baby is born. Until birth, your child is at risk from exposure to rubella. You must inform your GP or midwife if you find that you have been in contact with someone who has developed rubella, so that a blood test can be done to discover whether you have become infected. They will be able to advise you once the results are known.

### **What happens after I have had a risk assessment?**

Following your assessment, the risks will have been identified and a plan put in place to control the risks. The risk assessment should be reviewed at intervals throughout your pregnancy and following birth to ensure that the measures being taken are still relevant

### **Where can I get more information?**

Within your work place, the following people should be able to help:

- HR team
- Occupational Health Advisor
- Health and Safety Manager / Representative

Alternatively:

The Maternity Alliance - [www.maternityalliance.org.uk](http://www.maternityalliance.org.uk)  
National Childbirth Trust – [www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com](http://www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com)  
Flexible Working – [www.new-ways.co.uk](http://www.new-ways.co.uk)