

Policy for New and Expectant Mothers

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to describe the policy and procedures for Protecting the health of the new or expectant mother as required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Legal requirements

Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 (MHSW) provides the legal requirements on employers to protect their employees who are or in the future could be a new or expectant mother. Employers are required to assess risks to all their employees and to do what is reasonably practicable to control those risks. They must include any hazards/risks to new and expectant mothers, when conducting this risk assessment. More information on how to do a risk assessment can be found in HSE's guidance Five Steps to Risk Assessment.

It is important that female employees inform their employers that they are pregnant, have given birth in the previous six months or are breastfeeding. The notification should be given in writing, as early as possible. When employers receive written notification from an employee that she is pregnant, has given birth within the previous six months or is breastfeeding, they must conduct a specific risk assessment. The assessment must take into account any advice provided by the woman's GP or Midwife on her health. If any risks are identified then employers must take action to remove, reduce or control the risk. If the risk cannot be removed employers must:

Action 1

Temporarily adjust her working conditions and/or hours of work; or if that is not possible

Action 2

Offer her suitable alternative work (at the same rate of pay) if available; or if that is not feasible

Action 3

Suspend her from work on paid leave for as long as necessary to protect her health and safety and that of her child.

Responsibilities

1. Employee's Midwife/General Practitioner has the responsibility to enquire about the employee's occupation and inform the employer of any specific risks regarding that employee (for example if the employee has an underlying medical condition that needs to be taken into account when carrying out the risk assessment).
2. The employer has the responsibility to carry out a specific pregnancy risk assessment (taking into account the information supplied by the GP/midwife) and put in place the necessary measure to protect the employee/pregnancy. There is no legal obligation for this to be done by an OH professional.
3. The Directors of St.Andrew's and Select English are responsible for the company wide prevention and protection aspects of the policy
4. Line managers are responsible for ensuring that the procedure is applied within their areas of responsibility and that recommendations regarding individuals and their work are complied with.
5. Individuals are responsible for notifying their line manager of their pregnancy and complying with appropriate advice and recommendations.

Introduction

Pregnancy is not an illness and although it is important to realise that there is a natural incidence of problems for the new or expectant mother and for the unborn child, it is known that their health may be affected by external physical or chemical factors. Such factors include heavy smoking, excessive alcohol intake, drug abuse and virus infections. It is known that some external factors including exposure to biological agents, chemicals, ionising radiations and physical stress may cause problems and this has led to concern that exposure of new or expectant mothers in the workplace may produce adverse effects. There is no totally reliable test for detecting potentially harmful agents and it is not therefore possible to rely entirely upon known harmful effects when formulating a policy for dealing with this problem. This policy therefore concentrates on minimising the exposure of new or expectant mothers to all chemicals and other potentially harmful agents. However, it is also necessary to consider the action to be taken when information on adverse effects is available.

It is also known that excess physical work, fatigue and poor working conditions may cause adverse effects to the new or expectant mother or unborn child, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy. The policy is therefore also concerned with ensuring that expectant mothers are provided with satisfactory working conditions and do not put themselves or the unborn child at risk by carrying out excessive physical work.

Procedure

1. All practicable measures will be taken both by the company and by the employee to minimise exposure to chemicals and other potentially harmful agents to all employees.
2. Possible adverse effects on the new or expectant mother and the unborn child will be taken into account during any assessment of the risks posed by working conditions or in the setting of any handling standards or exposure limits. These assessments will be made available to the relevant employees.
3. Employees will be asked to report to their line manager as soon as pregnancy is suspected so that any necessary advice can be given.
4. On notification of pregnancy the line manager will see the employee concerned and using the appropriate Generic Pregnancy Risk Assessment determine if a specific pregnancy risk assessment is required. This specific risk assessment will be the responsibility of the line manager and Vitasafety Ltd. will assist with this risk assessment where required.
5. New or expectant mothers will be given advice on the possible hazards of exposure to harmful agents during pregnancy. They will receive appropriate levels of information, instruction and training on what is required of them, and the particular risks and measures in place to effectively manage these risks - the findings of any risk assessments.
6. As required by the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations, appropriate facilities will be made available for expectant and breastfeeding mothers to rest e.g. rest room equipped with a comfortable chair and provision for privacy and quiet.
7. If in spite of all practicable measures being taken, the company considers that there is an unacceptable reproductive risk to a new or expectant mother; the company will take all reasonably practicable steps to find alternative employment for her. If satisfactory alternative employment cannot be found the employee will be medically suspended from employment in accordance with the terms of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 as amended by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (1993).
8. Where a new or expectant mother is unhappy about continuing her employment because of fears about the effects on her pregnancy, the company, even though the company feels that there is no risk, should sympathetically consider finding suitable

alternative employment. No guarantee can be given however that such suitable employment will be available.

9. The company will treat sympathetically requests for special working conditions which are medically required as a result of pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Action in the event of pregnancy

1. Members of staff must inform their line manager as soon as possible after receiving confirmation that they are pregnant. The company will require confirmation of the pregnancy from the expectant mother and review, and where necessary revise risk assessments to take account of the individual's pregnancy and potential return to work.
2. Employees working in areas where there is a possible risk are encouraged to notify their line manager as soon as pregnancy is suspected or planned.
3. The line manager will apply the generic pregnancy risk assessment for the employee's job. As a result of these risk assessments the company will supply verbal and written advice.

Working conditions and facilities

1. Pregnant employees may be particularly susceptible to the effects of such factors as temperature, lighting and noise. Special consideration will be given to the needs of pregnant employees when conditions are outside the comfort zone (normally taken to be between 18 and 24 deg C). Suitable facilities will be provided for pregnant employees to rest, and for breastfeeding mothers to express and store milk.e.g. rest room equipped with a comfortable chair and provision for privacy and quiet.
2. Overtime and work out of normal hours; reasonable amounts of overtime are acceptable provided that there are no problems with the pregnancy that could be exacerbated by excessive overtime. Exact levels cannot be laid down as it is dependent on the stage of pregnancy, the age of the pregnant mother and her general state of health.

Ergonomic considerations

Pregnant employees may have restricted ability to perform certain physical tasks. Physical capacity will vary according to stage of pregnancy and general physical capacity, however a specific risk assessment should be carried out where there is:

- Work which because of problems with posture, reach or clearance could cause ergonomic problems to the pregnant employee.
- Heavy or strenuous work
- Repeated heavy lifting

Strict limits on weights are not laid down as much depends on the stage of the pregnancy, the physique of the person involved, on the nature and shape of the materials to be lifted and the nature of the lift, but as a general guide after 20-24 weeks lifts should not exceed one half of the guidance weights issued by the HSE under the Manual Handling of Loads Regulations for female operators.

Industrial and Laboratory Chemicals

Most such chemicals have not been tested for reproductive effects and therefore all must be handled with extreme care during pregnancy. It should be noted that all toxic chemicals and carcinogenic chemicals are very likely to have serious reproductive effects and great care must be taken in handling these during pregnancy. The guidance under the regulations points out the particular hazard of working with chemicals toxic by skin absorption. Information is available on the reproductive effects of a limited number of Industrial and Laboratory chemicals. As a general rule chemicals covered by the label risk phrases set out below pose a specific risk and will require a specific risk assessment to be carried out.

- Toxic (R23, R24, or R25) or Very toxic ((R26, R27 or R28)
- Danger of cumulative effects (R33)
- Danger of very serious irreversible effects (R39)
 - Limited evidence of a carcinogenic effect (R40)
- May cause cancer (R45, R49)
- May cause heritable genetic damage (R46)
- Danger of serious damage to health by prolonged exposure (R48)
- Possible risk of impaired fertility (R60)
- May impair fertility (R62)
- Possible risk of harm to the unborn child (R61)
- May cause harm to the unborn child (R63)
- May cause harm to breast fed babies (R64)
- Possible risk of irreversible effects (R68)

For these compounds where an official exposure limit exists exposure should be controlled to a level below 10% of the exposure limit. Otherwise exposure should be controlled to less than 0.01 mg/m³ for solids and less than 0.1 ppm for gases and vapours. Within laboratories these materials must be handled to a high level of containment within a tested and validated fume cupboard, weigh hood or biosafety cabinet. Where large quantities are handled or procedures such as sieving or milling are being carried out further advice should be sought.

Potent carcinogens, cytotoxic and anti-neoplastic agents (anti-cancer drugs)

Most cytotoxic and antineoplastic agents have severe reproductive adverse effects.

Pregnant employees should not handle these materials where there is any risk of exposure including accidental exposure resulting from spillage or failure of primary controls.

Microbiological hazards in laboratories

Pregnant women and new mothers must not work with, or be exposed to at work, those agents which are known to present an especially high risk as listed in the ACDP Infection Risks to new or Expectant Mothers in the Workplace

The following is a list of these agents as detailed in the ACDP guidance that are considered to present a special risk in pregnancy. Work with any these agents should require a specific risk assessment. Additionally, pregnant women and new mothers should not work with, or be exposed to at work, any HG2 or HG3 biological agents because of the general risks associated with infections.

Visual Display Units

The Health & Safety Executive do not feel that there is any risk to pregnant employees from such work except where ergonomic problems occur due to problems with posture, reaches and clearances. However all cases where concern is expressed by an employee should be treated sympathetically

Implications for not advising your line manager if you are pregnant

There may be a number of circumstances where an employee may consider not advising her line manager about her pregnancy. However, by not advising the line manager, the employee may risk the following:

- Being asked to carry out work that puts herself and her baby at risk
- Being exposed to illnesses (through coming into contact with students in general and with those who have recently been abroad)

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT FOR THE EXPECTANT MOTHER

Name:

Pregnancy Stage: Weeks

Description of principal work area:

Does the employee's usual work involve:

Sitting

Sitting/Standing

Standing

No lifting

Minimal Lifting

Lifting to guidelines

Does the employee find their workstation comfortable/ uncomfortable

Details

Does the Employee work regular overtime? Yes No

If Yes, average weekly hours

Does the employee have an existing medical problem that may affect their health during pregnancy?

(eg diabetes, varicose veins)

.....
Does the Employee have any minor discomforts of pregnancy e.g. morning sickness

.....
Family history: Twins Hypertension Diabetes Other None

.....
Previous Obstetric History:

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Does the employee work with :

Chemicals

Pharmaceuticals

Biological agents

If YES give details:

Name and Address of Family Doctor:

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.....
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Tel:.....

Additional comments, adaptations or restrictions

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Next review: September 2018