



Campaigning
For Equality

Women's Equality Pregnancy Risk Assessment Know Your Rights



An advice leaflet
for Usdaw Members



What do I need to know about Pregnancy Risk Assessment?

Employers have a legal duty to protect pregnant women and their unborn child from any work-related risks.

Your employer should have done a general risk assessment to identify any risks that might affect women who become pregnant. When a woman tells her employer that she is pregnant they should do a specific risk assessment for her. It may be necessary to review the individual risk assessment as the woman's pregnancy develops.

Where possible, any risks should be removed or the woman's work should be changed to protect her. If it is not possible to do this, then she must be suspended on full pay for as long as is necessary to protect her health and the child's health.

The checklist below gives advice on some of the more common factors that may cause a risk to pregnant women. The list is based on guidance produced by the Health and Safety Executive. It is not a detailed or exhaustive list. There may be other risks where you work. It is your employer's responsibility to make sure that they have access to competent advice on any risk in their workplace.

| Problem/working conditions | Nature of the risk | What to look out for |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Manual handling | <p>The hormonal changes in pregnancy increase risk of manual handling injuries.</p> <p>Postural problems can also increase risks as pregnancy progresses.</p> <p>There can be risks for women who have recently given birth.</p> <p>Breast-feeding mothers may have problems because of increased breast size and sensitivity.</p> | <p>Does the job involve twisting, stooping or stretching to lift objects?</p> <p>Does the job involve rapid repetitive lifting (even of lighter objects)?</p> <p>Does the job involve lifting objects that are difficult to grasp or are awkward to hold?</p> |

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| <p>Movement and posture</p> | <p>A variety of factors linked to pace of work, rest breaks, work equipment and the work area can be involved. Hormonal changes during and shortly after pregnancy affect ligaments and can increase chances of injury. Postural problems may get worse as pregnancy advances.</p> <p>Standing in one position for long periods can cause dizziness, faintness, fatigue. It can also increase chances of premature birth or miscarriage.</p> <p>Sitting for long periods increases risk of thrombosis.</p> <p>Backache is also associated with long periods of standing or sitting.</p> <p>Confined space may be a problem particularly in the latter stages of pregnancy.</p> | <p>Does the woman have to stand for periods of, for example, more than two to three hours without a break?</p> <p>Does she have to sit for periods of more than two to three hours?</p> <p>Can the equipment and workstation be adjusted to fit the worker?</p> <p>Does the job involve awkward twisting or stretching?</p> <p>Are there space restrictions (for example, working behind a checkout)? Will these cause more restricted movement as the pregnancy develops?</p> |
| <p>Protective equipment and uniforms</p> | <p>Protective clothing or other types of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are not generally designed for use by pregnant women.</p> <p>Physical changes around pregnancy may make it too uncomfortable to wear, or may mean that it no longer provides the intended protection. Uniforms may also cause a problem, particularly as the pregnancy progresses.</p> | <p>If the woman has to wear protective aprons/overalls etc, are they provided in suitable sizes?</p> <p>If uniforms are obligatory are they provided in maternity sizes?</p> <p>Are the materials used comfortable for all pregnant women to wear?</p> |

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|--|---|---|
| <p>Hazardous substances – infection risks and chemicals</p> | <p>Exposure to infectious agents such as hepatitis B from bodily fluids could be a problem for funeral undertakers or for cleaners. Women working with raw meat may be exposed to toxoplasma.</p> <p>There are over 200 industrial chemicals that can cause harm to the unborn child.</p> <p>Most Usdaw members are unlikely to come across them at work.</p> <p>Members who work with pharmaceutical products may be at risk. Funeral workers and hairdressers could also be exposed. Some research suggests that the solvent used in dry-cleaning (perchloroethylene) may increase miscarriage risks.</p> | <p>Are there any infection risks in the work? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Embalming/preparing bodies for funeral workers. ● Clearing up spilled body fluids/disposing of used syringes for cleaners. ● Work with raw meat such as raw lamb. <p>If so are hygiene precautions adequate?</p> <p>Are any chemicals at work known to be a risk?</p> <p>Are pregnant women kept away from jobs that could increase exposure, for example, unloading dry-cleaning machines or clearing button traps?</p> |
| <p>Work-related violence</p> | <p>Violence and the fear of violence can increase the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and problems with breast-feeding.</p> | <p>Is the job one which is perceived to have a high risk of violence (for example, security work, single staffing in a petrol filling station)?</p> <p>Is there always support at hand to help staff who may be threatened or abused by customers?</p> <p>Are managers and supervisors aware of the extra risk for pregnant women?</p> |

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| <p>Work-related stress</p> | <p>New and expectant mothers can be vulnerable to stress because of hormonal, psychological and physiological changes around pregnancy.</p> <p>Additional stress may occur if the woman has reason to be anxious about her pregnancy.</p> | <p>Are there tasks which are known to be particularly stressful, for example, dealing with irate customers?</p> <p>Are colleagues and supervisors supportive towards the pregnant worker?</p> <p>Is the member aware of what to do if she feels she is being bullied or victimised?</p> <p>Has the individual risk assessment taken account of any concerns the woman has about her own pregnancy?</p> |
| <p>Welfare issues</p> | <p>Rest facilities: Rest is particularly important for new and expectant mothers.</p> <p>Hygiene: Easy access to toilets is essential to protect against risks of infection and kidney disease.</p> <p>Storage facilities: Appropriate arrangements for expressing and storing breast milk are needed for breast-feeding mothers.</p> | <p>Is there somewhere quiet for pregnant workers to rest?</p> <p>Are they protected from exposure to tobacco smoke in the rest area?</p> <p>Are they given easy access to toilets and more frequent breaks than other workers if needed?</p> <p>Is there a clean, private area for breast-feeding workers to express breast milk?</p> <p>Is there somewhere safe for them to store expressed milk?</p> |

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| <p>Working time</p> | <p>Long hours, and unsocial shift work can affect the health of pregnant women and can disrupt breast-feeding.</p> <p>Recent research has shown a link between night work and miscarriage.</p> | <p>Is the woman expected to work long hours/overtime?</p> <p>Does she have some flexibility or choice over her working hours?</p> <p>Does the work involve very early starts or late finishes?</p> <p>Does the job involve night work between the hours of, for example, 11pm to 7am?</p> |
| <p>Working at heights</p> | <p>Because of the risk of fainting and high blood pressure, it is hazardous for pregnant women to work at heights.</p> | <p>Does the work involve a lot of climbing up and down steps or ladders?</p> <p>Does the work involve carrying items or boxes up or down ladders?</p> <p>If a mobile work platform is used to access higher levels, is there enough room for a pregnant worker to use it safely?</p> |
| <p>Extremes of cold and heat</p> | <p>Pregnant women are less able to tolerate heat or extreme cold.</p> | <p>Does the work involve exposure to temperatures that are uncomfortably cold (below 16°C) or hot (above 27°C)?</p> <p>If protective clothing is provided against the cold, is it suitable for the pregnant worker?</p> <p>Is the worker exposed to cold draughts even where the average temperature is acceptable?</p> <p>Are there arrangements for frequent breaks and access to hot/cold drinks?</p> |

It is important to remember that this checklist is not comprehensive.

The fact that a point appears on the list does not mean that it is always a problem. For example, issues around restricted space at checkouts or other workstations may or may not pose a risk, depending on the design of the workstation and the progress of the individual pregnancy.

Three important things to remember

1. You are entitled to a pregnancy risk assessment once you have informed your employer in writing of your pregnancy.
2. Risks may change as your pregnancy progresses. If you are concerned at any stage in your pregnancy about your own or your baby's health or safety speak to your manager and your Usdaw Health and Safety Rep.
3. You are entitled to paid time off for antenatal appointments, including the time it takes you to travel to and from your appointment or class. You cannot be required to take annual leave or work the time back.

Get advice

For information about your rights to a pregnancy risk assessment contact your local Usdaw Office by calling 0800 030 80 30.

For further advice or assistance, Usdaw reps should contact the Health and Safety section in the Legal Department at Central Office.

Tel: 0161 224 2804

email: healthandsafety@usdaw.org.uk

Reference: New and Expectant Mothers at work: A guide for employers, HSG122, HSE Books, 2002.



Usdaw contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

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