

PREGNANCY - EXPECTANT **& NURSING MOTHERS**

Health, Safety & Wellbeing Guidance - Schools

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Pregnancy - Expectant and Nursing Mothers

See also the [Generic Risk Assessment for Pregnancy – Expectant and Nursing Mothers](#)

Introduction

Pregnancy should be regarded as part of everyday life, and its health and safety implications can be adequately addressed by normal health and safety management procedures. The health, safety and welfare of new and expectant mothers and their children are discussed in this guidance.

Many expectant / nursing mothers' work / study while they are pregnant, and many return to work / study while they are breastfeeding.

There may be many possible hazards in your establishment for expectant / nursing mothers which might also be transmitted to their unborn or new children. These hazards range from everyday matters such as handling heavy objects or shocks and vibrations to more specific risks associated with particular substances or processes, or some which may be a feature of the establishment's environment.

There is a legal and moral requirement under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations to give protection to these vulnerable expectant / nursing mothers and their unborn or newly born children. Establishments should assess the risks to all employees, giving special consideration to those who might be especially vulnerable due to their physical or mental condition, including new and expectant mothers, and to do what is reasonably practicable to control those risks. This assessment must be shared with all staff who may be required to act on its findings.

If the risk cannot be avoided by other means, the establishment may need to make changes in working / study conditions or hours, offer suitable alternative work / study, or if that is not possible give the worker paid leave for as long as necessary to protect her health and safety or that of her child (for an expectant / nursing pupil alternative educational provision other than attendance at school may need to be considered).

There is a requirement on the expectant / nursing mother to notify the establishment, in writing, that she is pregnant, and they may request that a certificate from a GP or registered midwife confirming the pregnancy be produced.

If you require any further information or help with this matter, please contact your Area Health and Safety Consultant who will be pleased to assist you with your queries.

Information for Women of Child-Bearing Age

The early stages of pregnancy can be a time when the developing foetus is most susceptible to developmental aberrations. Risk assessments should highlight any particular risk to pregnant women.

Pregnancy should not be equated with ill health. It is part of everyday life, and its health and safety implications can be adequately addressed by normal health and safety management.

First Three Months of Pregnancy

Some women experience nausea and vomiting, particularly in the morning, which may be a problem for early shift workers. Some women are particularly sensitive to bad odours which may increase nausea, and longer rest periods may be required for those experiencing extreme tiredness. Compulsory overtime should not be required.

During the Second Three Months of Pregnancy

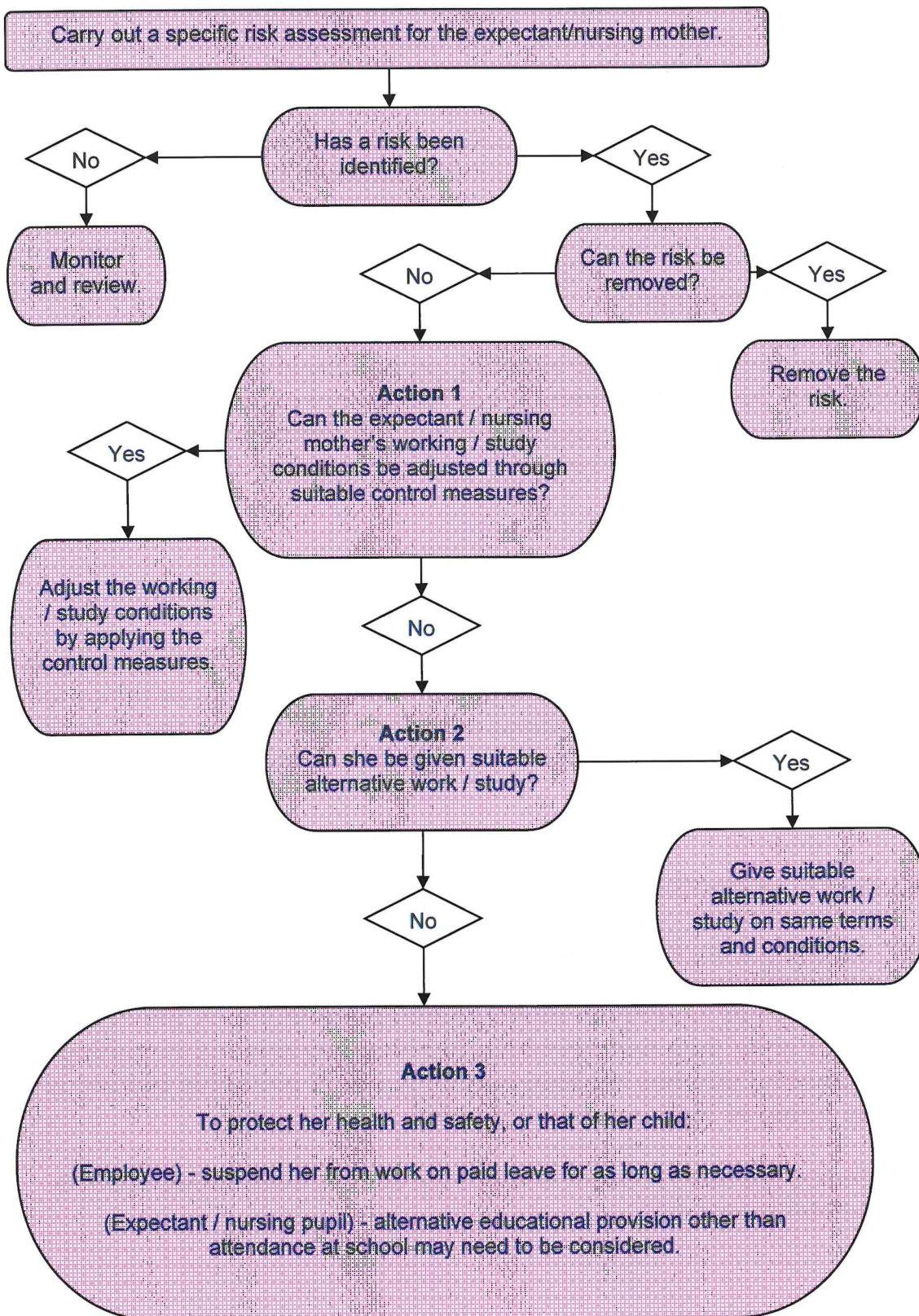
Some women often experience low back discomfort and stiffness, so the provision of comfortable workstations is even more important. There may be a tendency for blood to pool in the legs, leading to dizziness and fainting, with prolonged standing or working in hot environments. Varicose veins may also develop under these conditions.

During the Last Three Months of Pregnancy

Many women experience increasing fatigue, insomnia, and shortness of breath. There is also a tendency to urinate more frequently. Prolonged standing or jobs requiring balance (such as working on slippery surfaces), endurance, exertion, work in hot environments or far from bathroom/toilet facilities may become increasingly difficult. Also, increasing size has implications for the use of protective clothing and work in confined areas, as well as manual handling.

When breast-feeding the main concern is exposure to toxic substances, such as lead, which can enter breast milk.

On Notification of Pregnancy, Birth or Breastfeeding



All of the above actions should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

Typical Hazards and Risks

AGENTS/WORKING CONDITIONS	THE RISKS	AVOIDANCE
Shocks, vibration, or movement	Regular exposure to shocks and low frequency vibration may increase the risk of miscarriage.	Expectant/nursing mothers are advised to avoid work/study likely to involve whole body vibration, or where the abdomen is exposed to shocks or jolts. Breastfeeding mothers are at no greater risk than other persons.
Manual handling of loads where there is a risk of injury	Expectant mothers are especially at risk from manual handling injury. New mothers, particularly those who have had Caesarean section, will be temporarily limited in their lifting and handling capability. There is no evidence to suggest that breastfeeding mothers are at greater risk from manual handling than any other workers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Avoid the need for hazardous manual handling. 2. Assess the risks from those operations that cannot be avoided; and 3. Take steps to reduce these risks to the lowest level.
Noise	There appears to be no specific risk to new or expectant mothers; however, prolonged exposure to noise may lead to increased blood pressure and tiredness.	Ensure noise levels are regulated.
Movements and postures	<p>Fatigue from standing and continual physical work has long been associated with miscarriage, premature birth, and low birth weight.</p> <p>Excessive physical pressure can increase blood pressure.</p> <p>Expectant mothers are more susceptible to accidents, particularly during the later stages of pregnancy.</p>	<p>Hours, volume and pacing of work/study should be controlled, with the expectant/nursing mother themselves having a say in how their work/study is organised. Seating should be available.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to longer or more frequent breaks.</p> <p>Adjusting workstations and work procedures to reduce the risk of accidents.</p>

AGENTS/WORKING CONDITIONS	THE RISKS	AVOIDANCE
Extremes of cold and heat	Expectant mothers tolerate heat less well. The risk reduces after birth. Breastfeeding may be impaired by dehydration.	Rest facilities and access to refreshments should be available. Expectant mothers should not be exposed to prolonged heat or cold. Ensure temperature levels are regulated.
Work with display screen equipment	There are no risks from radiation. No protective measures are required.	If concerns remain, consider redesigning work activities so as to avoid VDU work. Workstations to be assessed and setup correctly.
Biological/chemical agents	Many biological and chemical agents can have an effect on expectant mothers. A small number of these may be relevant to the County Council's activities, e.g. pesticides and carbon monoxide exposure.	Any potential exposure to any agents must be covered by individual assessments.

Physiological Changes

There are many general, non-specific problems which apply to all expectant/nursing mothers. Fatigue is more common in pregnancy, and often backache follows with the altered centre of gravity. The expectant mother may also need to pass urine very frequently and will of course gain weight. And as the weight gain increases, heartburn, indigestion and constipation are common.

As the pregnancy progresses the expectant mother may experience shortness of breath, difficulty in sleeping and a general feeling of being uncomfortable. The employee may also experience swollen feet and ankles and abdominal itchiness.

Morning sickness is very common in the early months of pregnancy, and apart from the obvious distress this causes, it may also cause problems at the establishment of work/study. The expectant mother may be late for work/study - and this is at the very time she may wish to disguise her pregnancy.

Many expectant mothers do not tell their establishment Headteacher/Manager that they are pregnant until well into their second trimester - which is after the greatest risk to the developing foetus.

Working with Display Screen Equipment

In the past there were concerns about the possible effects of radiation emissions from display screens (VDUs) on expectant mothers. To date there has been no evidence that there are any adverse risks either to the woman or foetus.

Ergonomic/Manual Handling Hazards

Back strain is the biggest and most common health risk facing expectant mothers. Prolonged standing can lead to dizzy spells and fainting, and pregnancy can also lead to varicose veins. Prolonged sitting can also be harmful as swelling of the ankles can be a risk. The dangers from manual handling affect everyone, not just the expectant mother, but awkward and repetitive heavy lifting has been linked to miscarriage.

Ergonomically, the increasing size of an expectant mother may mean that she needs more space to continue to work/study comfortably. Her degree of mobility, dexterity and co-ordination may also be reduced. Her balance may also be affected.

Risks associated with manual handling must be reduced to the lowest level reasonably practicable. Where a manual handling assessment is carried out an individual's capability must be taken into consideration (including the fact that they might be pregnant).

Psychosocial/Organisational Risks

Stress

The risks from stress are well established and are linked with raised blood pressure which is dangerous for expectant mothers. Combined with long hours this may affect pregnancy.

Working/Study Time/Hours

In some cases, a correlation between long working hours and a high risk of miscarriage has been found. But it is difficult to assess exactly the reproductive hazards as there are so many factors involved. Headteachers/Managers can assist expectant/nursing mothers by being flexible in working/study patterns, for example giving the expectant/nursing mothers the opportunity to miss the rush hour or to come in later if they are suffering from morning sickness.

Aspects of Pregnancy That May Affect Work/Study

Apart from the hazards listed, there are other aspects of pregnancy that may affect the expectant mother. These are listed in the table below, and will need to be under constant review:

ASPECTS OF PREGNANCY	FACTORS IN WORK
Morning sickness	Early shift work Exposure to nauseating smells
Backache	Standing/manual handling/posture
Varicose veins	Standing/sitting
Haemorrhoids	Working in hot conditions

ASPECTS OF PREGNANCY	FACTORS IN WORK
Frequent toilet visits	Difficulty in leaving job/site
Increasing size	Protective clothing Work in confined area Manual handling
Tiredness	Overtime Evening work
Balance	Slippery, wet surfaces
Comfort	Tight-fitting workspaces