



### The less obvious changes to your body during pregnancy

While most of the time pregnancy is a normal and healthy condition, it still changes your body and how you feel. Some of the changes are obvious! But pregnancy also changes your body in ways you can't see, including:

1. Changes to your immune system, meaning you can be more at risk of catching certain infections. Some of these could be dangerous for you, your pregnancy or your baby.
2. How you react to certain chemicals – even chemicals and medications that you handle every day on the farm might be dangerous for your pregnancy or your baby.
3. Changes to your muscles and your ligaments which can make you more likely to get injured. Your centre of gravity can also change, which might make you more at risk of falls.

The changes of pregnancy begin even before it is obvious to others that you are pregnant. So **always mind the bump, even before the bump can be seen!**

### Mind the Bump – infections

- The farm is a natural home to many germs that can cause gastroenteritis (infectious vomiting and diarrhoea). [Gastroenteritis](#) is never pleasant but pregnancy can increase your risk of becoming dehydrated (low in fluids). Also, having a fever (temperature of 38°C or higher) for a period of time when you are pregnant could increase your risk of complications, including miscarriage and premature labour.
- You can catch a germ called [toxoplasmosis](#) on farms. Most of us think of cats when we hear toxoplasmosis. But you can also catch this germ by being in contact with soil, or with birthing animals and the clothing, equipment and bedding that was in contact with them. Toxoplasmosis in pregnancy could cause complications to your baby, like eye damage and brain damage.
- Other infections you can catch from birthing animals include listeriosis and Q fever. These infections can cause stillbirths and miscarriages.
- Hepatitis E is a virus that you can catch from contact with pigs or their manure (poo). This virus can cause your liver to become inflamed, and can cause pregnancy complications too.

**A working farm is never going to be as sterile as an operating theatre. But here are our top tips to protect yourself from infection:**

1. Wear gloves when coming into contact with animals or their poo and also while gardening or tending to farmland
2. Make sure to [wash your hands](#) and any other exposed skin (like your elbows and forearms) with soap and warm water after coming into contact with animals, even if you were wearing gloves.
3. Do not touch or handle pregnant or birthing sheep, goats or cows.
4. Don't come into contact with new-born animals, or with afterbirth, birthing fluids or any materials, such as bedding, that may have been exposed to amniotic fluids.

5. Stay away from dirty clothing used by those helping birthing animals and newborn animals. People using this clothing should ideally remove it outside and make sure it is washed correctly. This clothing will be safe for you to handle only when it has been washed on a hot cycle.
6. If your partner or other family members are in contact with birthing animals, make sure they take extra precautions to protect you, including wearing gloves and handwashing.
7. Make sure all your vaccines, including tetanus, whooping cough and flu, are up to date.

### Mind the Bump - chemicals

- When you are pregnant your baby's brain, nerves and organs are developing fast. They are very sensitive to any toxic effects from veterinary medications and chemicals like pesticides, herbicides, and chemicals used in sheep footbaths.
- Some hormones used, like oxytocin and prostaglandin, increase your risk of miscarriage. Even if you wear gloves, there is still a risk if the needle accidentally punctures your skin.
- If you have too much contact with pesticides it can cause complications like miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight and birth defects.
- Think about carbon monoxide too. Exposure to carbon monoxide can increase your risk of miscarriage. If you have fuel-burning appliances, make sure you have working carbon monoxide alarms. Remember that fuel powered pressure washers will also produce carbon monoxide, so it is important that they are in good working and there is adequate ventilation when using them. Livestock buildings can have high levels of carbon monoxide too.

#### Our top tips for staying safe from chemicals on the farm are:

1. Avoid handling prostaglandin injections or any veterinary products which have an identified risk for a pregnant person.
2. As much as possible try not to come into contact with pesticides and sheep footbath chemicals. If you must use them, read all chemical labels carefully and follow all the directions for use.
3. Wear the recommended protective equipment - long trousers, long sleeves, gloves, face mask and goggles. Leather shoes and boots can absorb chemicals, so make sure to wear neoprene or PVC boots when spraying liquids.
4. Wash hands and other exposed skin with soap and water after use.

### Mind the Bump – injuries

- Pregnancy causes your ligaments to soften and stretch. As well as causing back and pelvic pain, these changes can make you more prone to injuries to your muscles and your ligaments.
- As your womb gets bigger, your centre of gravity shifts forwards. This can change your sense of balance and increase your risk of falls.
- Pregnancy also increases your risk of injury from farm animals. As your body changes you may find you're slower to move out of harm's way.

### Our top tips to protect yourself from injury

1. Ask for help and accept help. You are growing an entire human being - you have nothing to prove!
2. Avoid handling animals on your own - always have someone with you.
3. Think of any changes that could make life easier. For instance, can a gate or a door be hung differently so you don't have to lift it each time?
4. Avoid lifting equipment or animals. If you must lift, bend from your knees and keep your back straight.
5. Try not to stand for long periods of time and be aware of your posture.
6. Bring your mobile phone with you when you are going onto the farm, and tell someone where you are going.
7. Listen to your body. If something hurts, stop doing it. Don't push through pain.

### Further information:

There is useful information in the following Department of Public Health factsheets:

- Washing your hands
- Handling food and cleaning
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Could your well make you unwell?
- VTEC (STEC) on the farm
- Verotoxin-producing E.coli (VTEC) (also known as STEC)
- Reduce the risk of getting toxoplasmosis while pregnant

Visit <https://bit.ly/publichealthploughing> to download the fact sheets or scan the QR below:



**Public Health Area B**

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