
	<h2 style="color: white; margin: 0;">Frequently Asked Question</h2>				
Ref: FAQ 005:04	RE: Pregnant Employees				
Issue date:	July 2015	Revised Date:	October 2020	Review date:	October 2022
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Note:	<p><i>This information/advice has been issued in response to frequently asked questions around a specific topic and may not cover all issues arising, should you require more specific advice please contact the Health & Safety Help Desk. The management of any occupational safety and health issue(s) remains the responsibility of local management.</i></p> <p>In relation to COVID-19, Health Care Workers who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired should not be at work, however may work from home subject to physician approval.</p> <p>For further information please refer to the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, Institute of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists guidance on COVID-19 Infection Guidance for Maternity Services.</p>				

When do the Regulations apply?

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, Part 6, Chapter 2, Protection of Pregnant, Post Natal and Breastfeeding Employees (from now on referred to as The Pregnancy Regulations) apply when an employee informs her manager that she is pregnant, has recently given birth or is breastfeeding and provides an appropriate medical certificate.

Note - As the earliest stages of pregnancy are the most critical ones for the developing child it is in the employee's best interest to let her employer know she is pregnant as soon as possible.

What should a manager do when he/she is informed that an employee is pregnant?

Once a manager becomes aware that an employee is pregnant, they must assess the specific risks from the employment to that employee and take action to ensure that she is not exposed to anything, which would damage either her health or that of her developing child.

Risk assessments should already have identified any hazards, which may present a risk during pregnancy. The risk assessment specifically required by the Pregnancy Regulations should therefore, be a re-appraisal of the hazards already identified. Click [here](#) to access the Pregnancy Risk Assessment.

Does the HSE need to provide a rest room?

Regulation (24) states that a rest room will be available for pregnant, post natal and breastfeeding employees to allow them to lie down and rest in appropriate conditions.

Can a noisy environment affect my health whilst pregnant or that of my unborn child?

There are no additional specific risks to new or expectant mothers or to the foetus but prolonged exposure to loud noise may lead to increased blood pressure and tiredness. Compliance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, Part 5, Chapter 1, Control of Noise at Work should be sufficient to meet the needs of new or expectant mothers.

I am pregnant /breastfeeding and work with radioactive sources. What damage can the cause?

Ionising Radiation e.g. patient care following a nuclear medicine scan.

Significant exposure to **ionising radiation** is harmful to the foetus. Work procedures should be designed to keep exposure of the pregnant employee as low as reasonably practicable and certainly below the statutory dose limit for a pregnant employee. As for all employees where there is a risk of exposure, control measures must be implemented to reduce the risk to a reasonable level and identified in the department risk assessment. The guidance offered by the Radiation Protection Officer should be adhered too in such circumstances and all internal procedures and protocols relating to this risk implemented.

Non Ionising Radiation

Pregnant or breast-feeding mothers **are at no greater risk** than other workers when working with optical radiation. Exposure to electric and magnetic fields when working with electromagnetic fields and waves within current recommendations is not known to cause harm to the foetus or the mother. However extreme over-exposure to radio-frequency radiation can raise body temperature making the pregnant mother uncomfortable.

Can extremes of cold or heat affect my unborn baby or me?

When pregnant, some women tolerate heat less well and may be liable to heat stress and/or faint easily. Breast-feeding may be impaired by heat dehydration. No specific problems arise from working in extreme cold but warm clothing should be provided as per risk assessment.

What biological agents are harmful to me while pregnant?

Some Biological agents are known to cause harm to the foetus, or physical and neurological damage. Many biological agents may affect the unborn child if the mother is infected during pregnancy. Examples of agents where the child might be affected are: rubella, hepatitis B, HIV, herpes, TB, syphilis, chicken pox and typhoid.

Additional information can be found in the [Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(Biological Agents\) Regulations 2013 \(S.I. No. 572 of 2013\)](#) which sets down the minimum requirements for the protection of all employees from the health risks associated with biological agents in the workplace. A list of biological agents and their classification, together with indications concerning containment

measures and levels can be found in the [Code of Practice to Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(Biological Agents\) Regulations 2013 \(S.I. No. 572 of 2013\)](#).

As a pregnant employee it is always recommended that you check your immunity levels with your local Occupational Health Department and avail of the immunisation programme provided free of charge through your local Occupational Health Department.

COVID-19

Pregnant health care workers should be allocated to patients, and duties, that have reduced exposure to patients with, or suspected to have, COVID-19 infection. It is specifically recommended to avoid rostering pregnant staff to COVID-specific units or wards, and redeployment to lower risk duties should be considered. Those pregnant staff who also have underlying medical conditions should discuss with their treating obstetrician as redeployment or working from home may be further advised.

The HSE's list of those who are considered vulnerable healthcare workers includes women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

What chemical agents are known to endanger the health of pregnant employee and their unborn child(ren)?

Hazard Statements and associated risks from substances labelled as follows:

- H340/H341 May cause genetic defects/suspected of causing genetic defects
- H350/H350i/H351 May cause cancer/may cause cancer by inhalation/suspected of causing cancer
- H360/ may damage fertility or the unborn child
- H360D/ may damage the unborn child
- H360FD/may damage fertility, may damage the unborn child
- H360Fd may damage fertility, suspected of damaging the unborn child
- H360Df may damage the unborn child, suspected of damaging fertility
- H361 suspected of damaging fertility or the unborn child
- H361d suspected of damaging the unborn child
- H361fd suspected of damaging fertility, suspected of damaging the unborn child
- H362 may cause harm to breast-fed children
- H370 causes damage to organs
- H371 may cause damage to organs
- Substances and mixtures referred to in Schedule 1 (see Appendix 1 for list) to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens) Regulations 2001 (S.I. No. 78 of 2001) (amended by the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 622 of 2015)),
- Substances and mixtures released by a process referred to in Schedule 1 to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens) Regulations 2001 (S.I. No. 78 of 2001) (amended by the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 622 of 2015)),

- mercury and mercury derivatives,
- antimitotic (cytotoxic) drugs,
- carbon monoxide,
- chemical agents of known and dangerous percutaneous absorption.

The above list of hazard statements and chemical agents refers specifically to pregnant employees and further hazards statements can be referenced in the Chemical Agents FAQ.

I work for long periods at a display screen – is this harmful to my unborn child?

The provisions of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, Part 2, Chapter 4, Display Screen Equipment (DSE) apply to all regular users of DSE's. There are no documented risks associated with pregnant employees working with display screen equipment (DSE).

However it should be noted that the pregnant woman should adapt the support offered by her chair to ensure that her lower back is supported properly especially as the pregnancy progresses.

What is Health and Safety Leave?

If a risk is identified, the employer must eliminate the risk/adjust the work. If the employer cannot eliminate the risk, the employee must do the following:

- Change or adapt the work practices to eliminate the risk, including changes to shift patterns or work location.
- Be provided with suitable alternative employment if not possible then,
- The employee must be granted Health and Safety Leave in accordance with Section 18 of the Maternity Protection Act, 1994 revised 2004.

Health & Safety Leave is 21 paid days off and is only granted if the previous steps cannot be implemented. It is only granted following the risk assessment process and on agreement between the employer and employee.

Other types/forms of leave are available to HSE staff and information on same can be downloaded [here](#).

If there are issues/concerns regarding any aspect which this FAQ relates, then these should be discussed with your line manager and documented as part of the risk assessment process as appropriate.

Additional Resource Information

Legislation

The Safety, Health & Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, Chapter 2 of Part 6: Protection of Pregnant, Post Natal and Breastfeeding Employees (commonly referred to as The Pregnancy Regulations).

The Maternity Protection Act, 1994 and Amendment Act, 2004:

Useful Contacts and References

[Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(General Application\) Regulations 2007. Chapter 2 of Part 6, Protection of Pregnant, Post Natal and Breastfeeding Employees.](#)

[Pregnant Employee Risk Assessment Form](#)

Equality Authority, Clonmel Street, D2, Tel: 01 4173333, lo-call: 1890 245545 or visit website www.equality.ie.

Maternity Benefit Section, Department of Social and Family Affairs at 1890 690690 or by email maternityben@welfare.ie.

Appendix 1

Schedule 1 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogen Regulations 2001)

SCHEDULE 1 Regulation 2(c)

List of Substances, Preparations and Processes referred to in Regulation 2 (c)

- (1) Aflatoxins
- (2) Arsenic
- (3) Auramine manufacture
- (4) Isopropyl alcohol manufacture (strong acid process)
- (5) Leather dust arising during preparation and finishing in boot and shoe manufacture
- (6) Magenta manufacture
- (7) Mustard gas (β, β' -dichlorodiethyl sulphide)
- (8) Rubber manufacturing and processing giving rise to rubber process dust and rubber fume
- (9) Work involving exposure to aromatic polycyclic hydrocarbons present in coal soot, coal tar or coal pitch.
- (10) Work involving exposure to dusts, fumes and sprays produced during the roasting and electro-refining of cupro-nickel mattes.
- (11)¹ Work involving exposure to hardwood dusts.

(Note - Entries at points (1),(2),(5),(6),(7) and (8) are from the British HSE EH40 list)