

Guidance on Risk Assessments for Pregnant Workers and New Mothers

Definition

A new and expectant mother is defined as “An employee, who is pregnant, has given birth within the preceding 6 months or is breastfeeding”.

Why do we need to risk assess new and expectant mothers?

Most pregnant workers will experience few or no complications during pregnancy. Unfortunately, however, there are some who may experience a variety of potential health problems during their pregnancy; some may continue to have problems following the birth also. There may also be factors present in the individual's role which, whilst not a risk normally, may pose problems during their pregnancy.

Some of the typical issues that expectant mothers experience during pregnancy include; morning sickness, backache, increased need to use the toilet, fatigue, increasing abdominal size and changes to posture, altered centre of balance, etc. Whilst this list is not exhaustive, it is the responsibility of the employer to assess whether any aspect of the mother's pregnancy, or the working conditions, could potentially cause harm to them or their child.

Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 (MHSW)

MHSW places a legal duty on employers to protect their employees who are, or in the future could be, a new or expectant mother. Employers are required to assess risk to all their employees and to do what is “reasonably practicable” to control all identified high risks. The assessment should include all likely hazards which will be encountered by the new or expectant mother during their pregnancy – full details of the risk assessment process are provided further in this guidance.

It is the responsibility of the individual employee or student to inform the University of their pregnancy as soon as possible so that appropriate controls can be put in place to minimise any risk. Individuals who have given birth in the last 6 months or are still breastfeeding should also inform the University. The notification should be given in writing, as soon as possible on learning of the pregnancy.

Following receipt of the written notification from the employee, an individual risk assessment must be conducted. The assessment should take into account any specific advice / recommendations provided by a medical professional (e.g. midwife or GP) relating to the individual's health. If any significant risks are identified then employers must take reasonable action to remove, reduce or control the risk appropriately.

In the unlikely situation that the risk cannot be removed or controlled adequately then employers must follow the below **control measure steps**:

1. Temporarily adjust the individual's working conditions and/or hours of work, or, if that is not possible;
2. Offer the individual suitable alternative work at the same rate of pay if available, or, if that is not possible;
3. Suspend the individual from work on full pay for as long as necessary to protect the health & safety of the individual and of the child.

MHSW also requires that where a new or expectant mother works night shifts and the individual provides a medical certificate from a GP or midwife stating that working nights will affect their health, that the employer must adjust the working hours, or where this is not possible, suspend the individual from work on full pay for as long as necessary.

Advice for Line Managers, Health & Safety Managers/Health & Safety Local Officers and others carrying out risk assessments.

A full risk assessment must be undertaken for all expectant and new mothers. When completing an individual risk assessment:

- The expectant or new mother should be involved in the process so they understand all control measures identified.
- The person responsible for completing the risk assessment must talk to the new & expectant mother to help identify any conditions or circumstances with their pregnancy that could affect their work.
- Allow the new & expectant mother to discuss any concerns they may have about how their work could affect their pregnancy.
- Consider any medical recommendations provided by their doctor or midwife. ***It is the responsibility of the expectant mother to inform the risk assessor if there are any medical recommendations which need to be taken into consideration.***

Line Managers, Health & Safety Managers/Health & Safety Local Officers and others carrying out risk assessments must regularly review the individuals risk assessment to make any necessary adjustments:

- As the pregnancy progresses, it is recommended that the risk assessment be reviewed each trimester of pregnancy.
- If there are any significant changes to the pregnant workers activity or workplace.

The Pregnant workers risk assessment can be found [HERE](#).

New mothers may also be more vulnerable to workplace hazards so risk assessments must be reviewed once they return to work. Where the mother returns to work within 6 months of giving birth then a separate new mother risk assessment should be carried out. The New Mother risk assessment can be found [HERE](#)

Common Risk to consider during assessments.

Aspects to consider during the assessment include:

- **Posture and position** e.g., sitting / standing for long periods, lifting or carrying of heavy loads, using a workstation that causes postural issues, etc.
- **Physical hazards** e.g., manual handling, awkward spaces, lone working, work at heights, work-related violence, vibration, etc.
- **Biological hazards** e.g., infectious agents (hazard groups 2, 3 and 4), infectious diseases. [The Approved List of biological agents: Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/bioagents/)
- **Chemical hazards** e.g., mercury, lead, teratogens and carcinogens (check labels and supplier data), radioactive substances, pesticides, carbon monoxide, antimitotic (cytotoxic) drugs
- **Working conditions** e.g., long working hours or night shifts, infrequent rest breaks, stress, exposure to pollutants, noise, very high or low temperatures, etc

If, despite existing precautions, the risk of harm to the mother or child is medium or high, consider the 3 control measure steps indicated above.

Where to obtain further information and advice

The University Health & Safety Services team are available for advice and assistance in assessing H&S risks – telephone ext. 9001 or email safetyunit@gre.ac.uk.

To download individual risk assessment templates visit [New & Expectant Mothers at Work | Health & Safety | University of Greenwich](#). It is the manager's responsibility to complete the forms in consultation with the new or expectant mother.

Other useful guidance documents:

- [Protecting pregnant workers and new mothers - Overview - HSE](#)
- [Protecting pregnant workers and new mothers - Workplace safety law \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Pregnant workers and new mothers: Your health and safety - HSE](#)