

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN FRANCISCO
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM
Information For
PREGNANT WORKERS/TRAINEES in the
RESEARCH LABORATORY SETTING

I. General Information

Where can I get general information about workplace risks in pregnancy?

- NIOSH has an excellent pamphlet about pregnancy titled *The Effects of Workplace Hazards on Female Reproductive Health*: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-104/>

If I am pregnant, what can I do to reduce my/my child's risks?

It is important to ask for help in evaluating your risks. The following resources are available:

- **Know your workplace:** UCSF Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) can help identify a list of possible infectious and chemical agents in the workplace that may be of concern to you and your doctor. Call the Public Health Office at (415) 514-3531 for a confidential risk assessment on what infectious and or chemical agents may be present at your work.
- **Talk to your OB-Gyn provider:** An OB-Gyn physician/provider who is aware of your medical condition and has a list of hazardous or infectious agents present at your work can help you make important decisions regarding whether you should ask for workplace accommodations.

II. Chemical Hazards

What chemicals pose a risk during pregnancy?

- Pregnant workers should avoid unnecessary exposure to chemicals. Since the beginning of the 20th century, thousands of new synthetic chemicals have been developed, and only a small portion of these chemicals have been adequately studied to determine whether they pose a risk of cancer or birth defects. Therefore, it is advisable to limit any unnecessary chemical exposure during pregnancy. Some chemicals are well known to increase the risk of cancer or birth defects. As an initial reference, the State of California Proposition 65 website is an excellent source of information, and can be accessed at: http://oehha.ca.gov/prop65/prop65_list/NEWlist.html

Where can I get more information about the risks of chemicals used in the workplace?

- You should have access to material safety data sheets (MSDS) on chemicals used in your work area. Review the MSDS information. If you still have concerns, contact the EH&S Public Health Officer for an individualized risk assessment for your workplace. Other resources:
MSDS should be available in your laboratory area. For more information on MSDS:
<http://or.ucsf.edu/ehs/7241-DSY/msds.html>

What are the risks of work chemicals in breast milk?

- Human milk is the best source of nutrition to human infants. However, toxic environmental chemicals and potentially work place chemicals as well as medications may be present in breast milk, generally at a small fraction of their concentration in the mother's serum. Discuss any concerns with your OB-Gyn

physician. The CDC/NIOSH has a good web site for further information:

http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/disease/environmental_toxins.htm

- For concerns about drug residues in breast milk, the Drugs and Lactation Database is available through the UCSF library on line: <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT>

What can I do to protect myself and my unborn child if I need to work around chemicals?

- Respiratory protection may be appropriate for certain individuals who are exposed or work directly with potentially hazardous chemicals. For example, organic vapor respirators may be assigned to pregnant employees working with isoflurane or formaldehyde.
- With any type of respirator use, a medical clearance must be granted through Occupational Health before employees can be trained and fit tested through Environmental Health and Safety. Please contact the Public Health Office or Occupational Health Services for more information about respiratory protection for pregnant workers.

What are the risks of gas anesthesia exposure during pregnancy?

- Gas anesthesia that are halogenated agents, such as Isoflurane, are commonly used as an anesthesia for animals. Halogenated agents have been linked to reproductive problems in women and developmental defects in their off springs. Some of these concerns include spontaneous abortions and congenital abnormalities in off springs of exposed females. There are inconsistencies within this area of research and exposure limits for isoflurane and other anesthetic agents have yet to be established. However, it is still important for pregnant workers to be aware of the risk and try to minimize occupational exposures.
- Isoflurane has been assigned to pregnancy category C by the FDA, meaning risks cannot be ruled-out and there is a chance of fetal harm if the drug is used during pregnancy though well-controlled human studies are lacking.

III. Biological Hazards

Are there infections that pose increased risks during pregnancy?

- Yes, many infectious agents that pose minimal risk to otherwise healthy individuals pose a higher risk to pregnant women or their babies due to changes in immune response as a result of pregnancy. It may take up to 6 weeks after the end of pregnancy for the maternal immune system to return to normal. Any infection that is cleared by cell mediated immunity poses greater risk during pregnancy, one example is Listeria—pregnant women have a much higher chance of developing listeriosis. Also, many common infectious agents pose significant risks to developing fetus. The most commonly cited example of infectious agents/diseases is abbreviated by the acronym TORCH: toxoplasmosis, other infections (e.g. Hepatitis B, syphilis, Varicella-Zoster, HIV, Parvovirus B19, Listeria, E. coli and group B streptococci), Rubella, Cytomegalovirus, and Herpes simplex.

Please see: *Avoiding infections in pregnancy (Beyond the Basics)*:

<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/patient-information-avoiding-infections-in-pregnancy-beyond-the-basics>

What vaccines are safe for pregnant women?

- In general, pregnant women should **not receive** any live bacterial or viral vaccines. Other vaccines that do not contain live bacteria or viruses are safe, but before getting any of these vaccines you should consult your OB-Gyn physician.

- For information on specific vaccines, refer to the Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) available through the Immunization Action Coalition <http://www.immunize.org/vis/>.
- Please note that any vaccines given to pregnant women should be thimerosal free as mandated by California State Law (AB 2943). The tuberculin skin test (TB test) is safe for pregnant individuals.
- **Consult with OHS:** After talking to your physician/provider to discuss hazardous agents present in your workplace and your health conditions, it may be necessary to minimize exposure through a restriction of job tasks. UCSF Occupational Health Services can assist in documenting any medical recommendations. If you have concerns about your risks, you may call UCSF Occupational Health Services at (415) 885-7580 for confidential counseling.

IV. Radiation Hazards

Does radiation pose a risk to my fetus?

- Any radiation exposure poses a risk of genetic mutation. All radiation exposure to a fetus should be avoided, especially early in pregnancy. UCSF policy prohibits exposure to more than 500 mrem. For more information about UCSF radiation protection policies, please refer to the UCSF radiation safety manual and be sure to review appendix H since it details the UCSF policy for pregnant employees: <http://or.ucsf.edu/ehs/8058-DSY/version/default/part/4/data/>
- Pregnant employees who work with radiation should inform UCSF as soon as they know they are pregnant in order to minimize radiation exposure. Please refer to the following link: <http://www.research.ucsf.edu/Forms/Eform-R002.pdf>
- Instruction Concerning Prenatal Radiation Exposure: <http://www.ehs.ucr.edu/radiation/regulatoryguide8.13.pdf>

V. Working safely with animals

Does exposure to animals at my work pose a risk to me during my pregnancy?

- A zoonotic disease is one that can be transmitted from animals to humans. Almost any of the zoonotic disease agents that can infect healthy people pose more of a risk of infection for people who are pregnant. A zoonotic disease manual is available online and provides information about diseases associated with animals used at the UCSF and general methods on preventing disease transfer from animals. Zoonotic Disease Manual: <http://or.ucsf.edu/ehs/9399-DSY/13894>
- Please be aware that the Laboratory Animal Resource Center (LARC) actively monitors and tests research animals for zoonotic diseases. If you have questions regarding the species you are working with, please contact the Public Health Officer for a confidential risk assessment.
- Pregnant workers should also be aware that agents used in Animal Biosafety Level 2 rooms may pose an increased risk to them.

How can animal allergies affect my pregnancy?

- Hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy may affect the nose, sinuses and lungs. The increase in estrogen hormone contributes to the congestion of the tiny blood vessels (capillaries) in the lining of the nose, which can lead to a “stuffy” nose. A rise in progesterone hormone can cause increased respiratory rate and a feeling of shortness of breath. These can exacerbate existing animal allergies or trigger new allergic symptoms.

- Individuals with regular contact to animals and have animal allergies may also be at increased risk for developing asthma. Asthma is the most common potentially serious medical condition to complicate pregnancy.
- Please see: *Pregnancy is Complicated by Allergies and Asthma*:
http://www.aaaai.org/allergist/liv_man/pregnancy/Pages/pregnancy_tips.aspx
- Please also refer to the allergies to laboratory animal educational information page:
<http://or.ucsf.edu/ehs/9399-DSY/12399>

VI. Physical Hazards

Do physical activities and ergonomic issues pose a risk to my fetus?

- Pregnant women should carefully discuss their job activities with their OB-Gyn physician/provider. Most UCSF jobs should not pose ergonomic/activity risks, however NIOSH recognizes strenuous physical labor (e.g., prolonged standing, heavy lifting) as a late term pregnancy risk.
- Pregnant women are more prone to ergonomic injuries induced by pregnancy, such as carpal tunnel syndrome or back pain. Make sure to maintain proper body mechanics and posture and ensure that your work environment is ergonomically correct for your needs. To reduce your risk of injury, complete the Back Safety training, Office Ergonomic training (applicable to all computer users) and the Laboratory Ergonomic training which can all be found on [Research Online](#). Do not hesitate to contact the Campus Ergonomist for assistance (ergonomics@ucsf.edu).

VII. Additional Resources for Pregnant Workers

What else can I do to reduce my risk?

- Always wear the recommended personal protective equipment.
- Always wash your hands after contact with animals, potentially infective or hazardous materials, and after taking off gloves.
- Ask for help in requesting accommodations in the workplace to avoid possible exposures through the UCSF Public Health Officer or UCSF Occupational Health Services. Depending on receptivity and cooperation of PI/lab members to recommendations from EHS, UCSF has a mediation service for work-related problem resolution: <http://worklife.ucsf.edu/resolve/index.html>

VIII. HR Information - Pregnancy Leave Information

When am I required to give notice of my pregnancy leave?

- UC asks that pregnant employees provide at least 30 days advance notice of your intention to take pregnancy leave. After notifying your supervisor, you should contact the Benefits Office for a Disability Claim Packet and a leave of absence request form will be included in the packet.

What are my pregnancy leave entitlements?

- There are three options: Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Pregnancy Disability Leave (PDL) and California Family Rights Act (CFRA).
- The FMLA is generally unpaid leave unless sick leave or vacation time is used. This requires 30 day advance notice to employer if leave is foreseeable. The request must be in writing in a FMLA form. The employee's job is protected for up to 12 weeks/calendar year and to qualify the employee must have at least 12 months of service or worked at least 1,250 hours during the 12 months prior to the requested

leave. In California, PDL allows employees to take up to 4 months of unpaid leave and it may run concurrently with FMLA.

- CRFA provides up to 12 weeks of leave with reinstatement rights and runs concurrently with FMLA. This leave begins when PDL ends but employee must qualify for FMLA first and there are no forms to complete.

How do I enroll my newborn or adopted child into UC-sponsored insurance plans?

- Your child must be enrolled into a UC-sponsored insurance plan within 31 days after he or she is born or adopted. To enroll your child, complete an Enrollment, Change, Cancellation or Opt Out form (UPAY 850) and submit it to your department HR representative.
http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/forms_pubs/subject/family_changes.html

Where can I find additional information on pregnancy leave?

- Below are online resources about the pregnancy leave process at UCSF:
<http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/pubs/article/pregnancy-disability-leave>
- General FAQ - http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/forms_pubs/checklists_factsheets/pregnancyfact.pdf
- Flowchart of responsibilities - http://hr.ucsf.edu/files/Staff_PregnancyDisabilityLeave_12.2012.pdf
- PowerPoint on pregnancy leave process - http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/files/dbrpregdiswksp_v1.pdf
- FMLA information
http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/forms_pubs/checklists_factsheets/fam_med_leave_checklist.pdf
- Please contact your department HR representative for more specific information on pregnancy leave and benefits during leave period.

IX. Post Pregnancy Information

Are there breastfeeding stations available on UCSF campuses?

- Yes, there are several breastfeeding stations located across campus. For a complete list of locations, please visit: http://www.whrc.ucsf.edu/whrc/lactservices/lactation_stations.html.
- Breastfeeding supplies are also available for sale or rent through the UCSF Women's Health Resource Center. For more information, please visit:
http://www.whrc.ucsf.edu/whrc/lactservices/lactation_supplies.html

Does UCSF offer pregnancy related classes for employees?

- Classes are available through the UCSF Women's Health Resource Center. A complete list of class and registration fees is available online at: <http://whrc.ucsf.edu/whrc/gex/classes.html>.