

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 several excellent resources for pregnant workers concerned about workplace health risks:

- *The Effects of Workplace Hazards on Female Reproductive Health*: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-104/>
- *Reproductive Health and the Workplace*: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/repro/infectious.html>

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 Office of Environment, 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 the infectious and/or chemical agents that may be present at your work.
- **Talk to your OB-Gyn provider:** An OB-Gyn physician/provider who is aware of your medical condition. Discuss the potential hazards or infectious agents present at your work, and your provider may be able to help you make important decisions regarding whether you should ask for workplace accommodations.
- **Get vaccinated:** In general, pregnant women should **not receive** any live bacterial or viral vaccines. Live viral vaccines include:
 - MMR (mumps, measles and rubella)
 - Yellow fever vaccine
 - Varicella (chicken pox and shingles 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. These vaccines include:

- Hepatitis vaccines
- Inactivated polio vaccine
- Tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis vaccines
- Influenza vaccine

Please note that any vaccines given to pregnant women should be thimerosal free as mandated by California State Law (AB 2943).

For information on specific vaccines, refer to the Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) available through the Immunization Action Coalition: <http://www.immunize.org/vis/>

The tuberculin skin test (TB test) is safe for pregnant individuals.

- **Consult with OHS:** After discussing the hazardous agents present in your workplace and your health conditions with your physician/provider, 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.

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 safety data sheets (SDS) on chemicals used in your work area. Review the SDS information. If you still have concerns, contact the EH&S Public Health Office for an individualized risk assessment for your workplace.

For more SDS information:

EH&S SDS: <http://ehs.ucsf.edu/safety-data-sheet-sds-1>

PHAC SDS: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/lab-bio/res/psds-ftss/index-eng.php>

NIOSH pocket guide to Chemical Hazards: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg/>

ATSDR ToxFAQs: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp>

HESIS: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/hesis/Pages/default.aspx>

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's web site provides further information on breastfeeding while working in the laboratory:

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 online: <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT>

What are the risks of gas anesthesia exposure during pregnancy?

Gas anesthetics such as Isoflurane, are commonly used as an anesthesia for animals. These agents may be linked to reproductive problems in women and developmental defects in their offspring. Some of these concerns include spontaneous abortions and congenital abnormalities in offspring 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 avoid or minimize occupational exposures.

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 Office of Environment, Health and Safety. Please contact the Public Health Office or Occupational Health Services for more information about respiratory protection for pregnant workers.

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. Many common infectious agents also pose significant risks to the 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.

For more information, see: *Avoiding infections in pregnancy (Beyond the Basics)*:

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

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 in early pregnancy. For more information about UCSF radiation protection policies, please refer to the UCSF Radiation Safety Manual and review Appendix H: Pregnant Personnel Policy:

<http://www.ehs.ucsf.edu/radiation-policies-manuals>

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.ucsf.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 through the EH&S website, which provides information about diseases associated with animals used at the UCSF and general methods on preventing disease transfer from animals. Zoonotic Disease Manual: <http://ehs.ucsf.edu/zoonoses-species>. Pregnant workers should also be aware that agents used in Animal Biosafety Level 2 rooms may pose an increased risk.

Some of the zoonotic agents that may be present in the species studied at UCSF include:

- **Q-Fever** (Sheep)
- **Enteric infections** such as shigella, campylobacter, and cryptosporidium (Many species, particularly pigs, sheep, non-human primates, dogs)
- **Giardia** (Cats, Dogs and Sheep)
- **Salmonella** (Many species, particularly rodents and reptiles)
- **Ectoparasites** (Many species)
- **Ringworm** (Cats, Dogs, Sheep, and Non-Human Primates)
- **Chlamydia** (Finches, Sheep)
- **Mycobacterium avium** (Finches)
- **Toxoplasma gondii** (Cats)
- **Orf/Contagious ecthema** (Sheep)
- **Herpes B** (Old World Primates)

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.

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* for more information:

http://www.aaaai.org/allergist/liv_man/pregnancy/Pages/pregnancy_tips.aspx

Additional information can also be found on the EH&S allergies to laboratory animal educational information page: <http://www.ehs.ucsf.edu/allergies-laboratory-animals-significant-health-risk>

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 Office Ergonomic training and the Laboratory Ergonomic training, which can be found on the EH&S Safety Training page (<http://ehs.ucsf.edu/ehs-safety-trainings>). You may also 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 the UCSF Public Health Officer or UCSF Occupational Health Services for help in requesting workplace accommodations to avoid possible exposures.
- Depending on receptivity and cooperation of PI/lab members to recommendations, UCSF has a mediation service for work-related problem resolution (<http://ombuds.ucsf.edu/ombudsMediation.html>).

For a Personalized Confidential Evaluation of Workplace Hazards

Contact:

Public Health Officer
Office of Environment, Health and Safety
50 Medical Center Way, Box 0942
San Francisco, CA 94143
Telephone: (415) 514-3531
PublicHealthOffice@ucsf.edu

UCSF Employees – For Confidential Medical Assessment and Counseling

Parnassus:	UCSF Occupational Health Services 350 Parnassus Avenue, Suite 206 or call (415) 885-7580
Mt. Zion:	UCSF Occupational Health Services 2330 Post Street, Rm 460 or call (415) 885-7580
Mission Bay:	UCSF Occupational Health Services 1855 4 th Street, Suite C1739 or call (415) 885-7580
VA:	VA Medical Center, Personnel Health 4150 Clement, Bldg. 203, GB17 Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. or call (415) 221-4810, x2735 (Only for staff permanently assigned to the VA)

UCSF Students--For Confidential Medical Assessment and Counseling

Mission Bay:	SHS Mission Bay 1675 Owens Street William J. Rutter Center, Room 330 San Francisco, CA 94143 (415) 476-1281
Parnassus:	SHS Parnassus 500 Parnassus Avenue Millberry Union, H Level, Rm. 5 San Francisco, CA 94143 (415) 476-1281

For more information, please also refer to the UCSF Policy for Immune Compromised Workers/Trainees in the Research Laboratory Setting: <http://ehs.ucsf.edu/ucsf-policy-immune-compromised-workerstrainees-research-laboratory-setting>

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 (<https://hr.ucsf.edu/hr.php?org=c&AT=cm&S=Benefits>).

Where can I find additional information on pregnancy leave?

Below are online resources about the pregnancy leave process at UCSF:

- Pregnancy Disability Leave: <http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/pubs/article/pregnancy-disability-leave>
- General FAQ: <http://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/forms/pdf/pregnancy-newborn-child-and-adopted-child.pdf>
Flowchart of responsibilities: http://hr.ucsf.edu/files/Staff_PregnancyDisabilityLeave_12.2012.pdf
Pregnancy Disability Workshop: <https://hr.ucsf.edu/hr.php?A=69&AT=cm&org=c&sref=4>

- FMLA information <http://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/forms/pdf/family-medical-leave.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>.