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Occupational Health Program

The goal of the Occupational Health Program is to protect the health and well-being of UofC employees¹. Participation in the Occupational Health Program is voluntary. Employees who are pregnant may benefit from meeting with the occupational health nurse, however this is not a requirement. Any information provided to the employee or their health care provider is based on information provided to the occupational health nurse and will be founded in current practice at the time of assessment. **Employees and their health providers retain full accountability for their own health decisions.**

The Occupational Health Program is supplementary to the University of Calgary’s existing hazard assessment and control procedureⁱ.

¹ Employees refers to all Faculty, Staff, Graduate and Undergraduate Students performing work on behalf of the University or under the direction of their professor or instructor

1.0 Guideline for Supporting Healthy Pregnancy at Work

Any employee who is pregnant should follow their Physician's guidance. Employees should ideally speak to their doctor 12 months before planning to conceive. This guidance document is supplementary information that is specific to the workplace only.

Employees who are pregnant² and exposed to workplace hazards can use this document to help support a healthy pregnancy.

Employees who do not wish to disclose health information to their supervisor may consult the occupational health nurse or their own healthcare provider confidentially.

2.0 Self-Assessment

The first step for pregnant employees entering the Occupational Health Program is to self-assess. Hazards in the workplace should be assessed by the employee, by the supervisor, or both.

Employees must be familiar with the hazards and potential harmful health effects caused by the products they work withⁱ. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that their employees are familiar with the potential hazards associated with their employee's work. Hazard assessments should be reviewed and updated at reasonably practicable intervals to prevent the development of unsafe and unhealthy working conditions:

- post incident
- when changes to operations are implemented (i.e. new equipment or a process is introduced to the work area)
- an employee's health status changes (such as in the case of pregnancy)

Information on hazardous materials and processes can be collected from the following resources (not limited to):

- Hazard Assessment and Control Forms
- Manufacturer/Supplier information, example:
 - Safety Data Sheets (SDS)
 - Source animal health information (if known)
- Pathogen Safety Data Sheets (PSDS)
- Supervisor
- Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)
- Occupational Health Nurse (OHN), Staff Wellness
- Other Health Care Providers
- Other Health and Safety Professionals

Working conditions that are considered safe in most circumstances may be considered potentially harmful to a pregnant employee or developing fetus.

Examples of hazards that may pose increased risk to a pregnant employee:

Biological Hazards	Chemical Hazards	Physical Hazards	Psychological Hazards
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Animal feces• Exposures to certain bacteria, virus, parasites and other pathogens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anesthetic Gasses• Lead• Toluene• Xylene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heavy Lifting• Radiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive stress

² In this document "pregnant" refers to currently pregnant or planning to conceive.

Once the self-assessment has been completed, and if new pregnancy-related hazards have been identified, employees have the following options open to them:

- Explore additional preventative measures for eliminating or reducing exposures with their Supervisor, EHS and their healthcare provider as needed.
- Consult the Occupational Health Nurse (proceed with an occupational health assessment)

3.0 Occupational Health Assessment

Once the employee has completed the self-assessment, they may wish to proceed with an occupational health assessment. All employees may consult the Occupational Health Nurse to address any work-related health concerns.

Consultation with the Occupational Health Nurse is not prescriptive or diagnostic; the employee retains accountability for their health decisions. Outcomes of the consultation could include:

- Review information on prevention of work-related illness
- Review of pregnancy related health promotion information
- Review of appropriate controls (engineering, administrative, personal protective equipment)
- Additional consultation with other stakeholders (e.g. physician, ability advisor)
- Discussion of appropriate workplace accommodation if necessary

4.0 Preventative Health Measures

4.1 Early Assessment

- To support a healthy pregnancy, it is important that an occupational health assessment is completed as early as possible to plan effectively and reduce potential exposures.

4.2 Education

- Education for pregnant employees could include:
 - Information about potential pregnancy health risks
 - Routes of harmful exposure
 - Prevention strategies

4.3 Controls

- If a hazard has been identified, recommendations for controls can be made to prevent harm during pregnancy.
- Effectiveness of controls should be evaluated on a regular basis through a variety of means (e.g. health surveillance, worksite inspections, and incident investigations).
- The hierarchy of controls should be followed (i.e. Elimination or Substitution → Engineering → Administrative → Personal Protective Equipment).

Example of some controls that need to be implemented or reviewed to control pregnancy related hazards

Elimination or Substitution	Engineering	Administrative	Personal Protective Equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of toxic agents from work environment • Use non-toxic chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immunization • Ventilation (biosafety cabinet, fume hood, local exhaust ventilation, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand washing • Frequent breaks; alternate sitting and standing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable gloves • Respirator

5.0 Occupational Health Surveillance

Health surveillance is the collection and interpretation of medical information and can lead to a change in practice in order to prevent advancement of illness if an employee is exposed to a workplace hazard. The recommendation may be made for inclusion in a health surveillance program based on the assessment of the hazard, potential for exposure, and the ability to provide surveillance.

Formal enrollment in a surveillance program due to pregnancy would be rare. Effective hazard control measures should be a predominant strategy for ensuring a healthy pregnancy. If an employee works through the duration of their pregnancy a controlled hazardous environment they may be included in a health surveillance program.

The elements of a health surveillance program include:

- Establishing baseline health status relative to the workplace hazard
- Monitoring for changes in health status that could be attributed to the workplace hazard
- Health and safety education to prevent harm
- Reporting (if necessary) to regulatory authority

6.0 Incident/Post Exposure Management

Although the goal of this program is to prevent incidents or exposures from occurring, exposures may still occur. Post exposure planning is important to mitigate harm in the event of an exposure.

If an employee experiences unexpected changes to their health during their pregnancy they should consult a healthcare provider immediately.

6.1 Post Exposure Protocol

Employees and supervisors must be familiar with the materials that they work with and follow appropriate first aid measures if an exposure occurs. All employees who work with biological material must review the University’s “Post Exposure Protocol for Biological Hazards”ⁱⁱⁱ. Employees who work with other materials should review manufacturer information and Safety Data Sheets for first aid protocols.

6.2 Post Exposure Prophylaxis

Employees exposed to certain pathogens can have their risk of harm to their own health or their pregnancy reduced by receiving appropriate prophylactic treatment immediately following an exposure. After seeking medical treatment employees must contact the Occupational Health Nurse, Staff Wellness as per the “Post Exposure Protocol for Biological Hazards” for follow-up.

7.0 Students

Pregnant students should direct their health concerns to their physician, faculty, department, and student accessibility services as needed.

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- i. [University of Calgary \(2015\) Hazard Assessment & Control Procedure](#)
 - ii. [Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code \(2009\) Part 2, Sections 7-8](#)
 - iii. [University of Calgary Post-exposure Protocol \(2015\)](#)