

Health & Safety

for pregnant women

All workers have a right to be protected from hazards at work and employers have a duty to care for the health and safety of their employees. However, pregnant women have specific rights to protection at work, for themselves and their unborn child.

Employers have three specific duties:

1

To carry out a risk assessment. As soon as it is known that an employee is pregnant, a risk assessment should be carried out on their job. Risk assessment should:

- ▶ Identify all significant hazards to health and safety
- ▶ Assess the risks they pose
- ▶ Implement necessary effective control systems
- ▶ Inform, instruct and train employees
- ▶ Check the system works
- ▶ Review the system controls and plans

2

To make temporary changes to working conditions and/or working hours to avoid exposure to health risks. If, having assessed a duty, the employer identifies a risk to a pregnant woman or an unborn child, they must provide alternative work which does not present any risk. Where a risk is identified as being the result of shift-working, the employer must provide alternative working patterns which do not present a risk to the mother or unborn child.

3

To send an employee home on full pay if suitable alternative work cannot be provided. If suitable alternative work is offered, it is expected that an employee will undertake such work. Should a woman refuse to do so unreasonably, she would forfeit her rights to be sent home on full pay.

The directive also covers new mothers, which means for a period after the baby is born women are still covered by the Act.

If a woman feels that her health is being in any way put at risk, by any work she is being asked to undertake, or if she feels that anything she is being asked to do may pose a danger to her new child, she should consult her Branch.

German Measles

Pregnant women should be aware that they must be protected from contracting German Measles during the early months of pregnancy. If a woman has not been told by her ante-natal clinic that she is immune it is most important that she advises her manager as soon as possible in order that precautionary measures may be taken without delay.

Should there be an outbreak of German Measles, arrangements must be made for her to work away from any source of infection and, if this is not possible, she should be sent home on full pay. For any woman reading this before becoming pregnant, it is worth having blood tests done by the GP to check immunity to German Measles.

Breast Feeding

After the baby is born and the new mother has returned to work, she may wish to continue breast feeding. The employer has a duty to provide appropriate facilities for her to express milk during the day and to store it in hygienic conditions. Many employers have not fully complied with this part of the legislation and if there are any problems, assistance should be sought from the Branch.