

**The University of Tennessee
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
Occupational Health Program**

PREGNANCY

People at Risk:

Working women face a special risk during pregnancy when the health hazards to which they are exposed are a threat to their unborn child.

Employees are encouraged to tell supervisors as soon as possible when they become pregnant. In addition, pregnant employees should discuss their work environment and duties with their personal physicians.

Physical Hazards:

Ionizing Radiation: Sources of ionizing radiation include both radioactive materials and radiation producing machines.

The human embryo/fetus is much more sensitive to radiation than the adult. Results of fetal irradiation include genetic defects, mutations, and later development of leukemia.

It is strongly encouraged that a pregnant user of radiation declare herself pregnant in writing to the Radiation Safety Office as soon as possible.

Zoonotic Diseases:

Toxoplasmosis: (See separate handout on Toxoplasmosis)

Fetal infection occurs when women become infected with Toxoplasma (a parasite) for the first time during pregnancy. Miscarriage or birth defects can result.

Listeria Momocytogenes: Listeriosis is a bacterial infection which may cause repeated spontaneous abortions. Many species can carry Listeria, but sheep, goats, and cattle are the most common source.

Chemical Hazards:

Formaldehyde: Formaldehyde is a liquid used primarily as a tissue preservative. Animal studies have shown formaldehyde to cause birth defects.

Anesthetic Gases: Overexposure of a pregnant woman to certain anesthetic gases may cause kidney disease, increased risk of abortion, and birth defects.

There are many other potential hazardous agents that pregnant women may be exposed to. Laboratories and facilities should provide employees with appropriate information on hazards present in each area. Guidelines for proper personnel protection (gloves, lab coats, masks, etc.) should also be made available. Pregnant women with concerns should contact their supervisor or safety officer.