

# The Science Safety Snippets

Welcome to this month's edition of the Faculty of Science's Safety Snippets newsletter. This month focuses on potential areas for concern for those who are considering pregnancy, who are pregnant or who are breast-feeding. Please direct all comments and feedback, including suggestions for articles particularly relevant to your area to [Sharon.Lockhart@sci.monash.edu.au](mailto:Sharon.Lockhart@sci.monash.edu.au)

## Working with Chemicals

Inhalation is the most common route of exposure to chemicals in the typical working environment at Monash University. The use of safe work procedures and facilities such as local exhaust ventilation will provide protection. Skin absorption and ingestion are generally less significant routes of exposure, provided safe work practices are observed. At Monash University, **everyone** is required to use appropriate safe work procedures when handling chemicals. Exposure to chemicals at levels below recognised exposure limits should not present a risk to you or your foetus during pregnancy or while breast-feeding, however once you know you are pregnant, you are encouraged to advise your supervisor or the Occupational Health Nurse as soon as possible. If you have any concerns about a chemical you are using, or the procedures for its safe use during pregnancy or while you are breast-feeding, you should seek advice straight away.

## Working with Animals

If you work with animals you have an increased risk of acquiring infections from animals. While maintaining safe work procedures can reduce the risk of infection, special care must be taken to prevent infections that could have serious effects on foetal development. For example, cats may harbour *Toxoplasma gondii* while pregnant sheep may carry *Chlamydia psittaci*. If you work with cats or sheep, or with any animal which you feel may adversely affect your pregnancy, you should seek advice straight away.

## Manual Handling

While physical activity and maintaining fitness is beneficial during pregnancy, excessive physical work or heavy lifting may pose a risk especially towards the end of pregnancy. If your work involves manual handling of weights greater than 10 kilograms, prolonged standing, repetitive lifting or maintaining awkward postures, then you should seek advice.

## Immunisations

Employees in certain work groups are advised to have vaccinations to protect against infections such as hepatitis B, hepatitis A, rabies, meningococcal meningitis, typhoid, Q fever and tuberculosis. If you are considering becoming pregnant, you should speak with your doctor about the kind of work you do and your immunization status. Ideally you should have all the vaccinations you require for your work environment prior to becoming pregnant.

Most vaccinations should not be given during pregnancy but some are regarded as safe while breast-feeding. If you have any concerns about immunization that may be required for your work, you should seek advice straight away.

## Working with Radiation

Levels of exposure to ionizing radiation that do not harm a pregnant woman may harm the developing foetus, particularly between 8 – 25 weeks gestation. As many women are uncertain of their conception during the early weeks of pregnancy, special consideration must be given to the use of ionizing radiation. It is very important for you and your foetus that you notify your Supervisor or Radiation Safety Officer (RSO) or Occupational Health as soon as you can, to ensure that your work is assessed and modifications promptly made to reduce radiation exposure.

If your work includes using ionizing radiation and you become pregnant, you have a choice to either continue working with ionizing radiation or take on other tasks. It is possible to work with ionizing radiation provided that Occupational Health has undertaken an assessment and has defined the actions that must be taken to ensure that the risk to you and your foetus is as low as possible. If you work with non-ionizing radiation and you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, then you should seek advice.

## Your role in ensuring a safe pregnancy

- Speak with your treating doctor prior to becoming pregnant about the kind of work you do and your concerns
- Contact the Occupational Health Nurse as soon as possible about your pregnancy for confidential medical advice and support. The Occupational Health Nurse will work with you to assess the nature of your work and the risks involved, provide information about your areas of concern and help you to continue working safely during and after pregnancy
- Notify your Supervisor, Safety Officer, Biosafety Officer or Radiation Safety Officer (RSO) so that an assessment and appropriate modifications can be made immediately to your work to minimise risks to your pregnancy. You can request that the information about your pregnancy is maintained as confidential.

## For further information

For confidential medical advice about pregnancy and work, contact the Occupational Health Adviser on Tel: (03) 990 51014, Fax: (03) 9905 2580 or Email:

[ohsehelpline@adm.monash.edu.au](mailto:ohsehelpline@adm.monash.edu.au)

For further details on policies and support resources for Monash staff and students during pregnancy including information on maternity leave, contact the Work Life Consultant on Tel: (03) 9902 0252.