

# Pregnant Workers Procedure

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Office of the Chief Risk Officer

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## Contents

<b>1. Document Background .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Purpose and scope of document .....	3
Terms and definitions .....	3
Responsibilities.....	3
Reference documents .....	3
<b>2. Procedure .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Procedural Steps.....	4
STEP 1 Worker declares pregnancy and supervisor conducts an initial screening .....	4
STEP 2 Conduct hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA).....	4
STEP 3 Communicate with Health and Wellness .....	6

**Version Control Table**

<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Approver</b>	<b>Change Summary</b>	<b>Status</b>
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## 1. Document Background

### Purpose and scope of document

The Pregnant Worker Procedure (hereafter known as “the procedure”) outlines the University of Ottawa (also known as “uOttawa”) procedure for pregnant workers exposed to a hazard, within and outside uOttawa premises.

The procedure applies to uOttawa employees and is extended to serve as a reference for stakeholders at uOttawa.

The procedure does not outline the independent requirements and potential risks or challenges specific to any project, workspace, or situation, but rather is intended to serve as a framework to build a fit-for-purpose approach for managing the applicable risks.

### Terms and definitions

Refer to the [OHS Glossary](#) for the OHS terms and definitions that apply to the documents within the management system.

### Responsibilities

The responsibilities of stakeholders, including supervisors and workers, are detailed in [Administrative Procedure 14-1](#) (Internal Responsibility Procedure for Health and Safety Issues).

In addition to the roles and responsibilities outlined in Procedure 14-1, additional responsibilities that apply to this procedure include:

#### Supervisors

- Assess the work environment and activities or tasks for hazards that may be harmful to pregnant workers, which may mean conducting hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA) and reviewing training records, the nature of work being performed, and proposed hazard controls
- Inform workers of any reproductive hazards

#### Workers

- Notifying their supervisors or an employer representative (e.g., Health and Wellness), especially in locations with hazardous materials, at the earliest available opportunity.

### Reference documents

- [General OHS Manual](#)
- [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#)
- [Workplace Screening Tool for Pregnant Workers](#)

## 2. Procedure

## Procedural Steps

The following procedural steps **must be followed** when planning for or performing work that is involves a pregnant worker:

1. Worker declares pregnancy and supervisor conducts an initial screening
2. Conduct hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA)
3. Communicate with Health and Wellness (if a medical accommodation is required)

Additional steps may be required based on the project or work scope.

### STEP 1 Worker declares pregnancy and supervisor conducts an initial screening

#### Key activities

- Worker declares pregnancy to supervisor or employer representative (e.g., Health and Wellness)
- In collaboration with the pregnant worker, the supervisor conducts an initial screening to identify hazardous situations, processes, or equipment that is of increased risk to the pregnant worker.

#### Contextual Details

The supervisor conducts the preliminary workplace assessment [through a qualitative survey](#). The survey shall consult the worker(s) involved to identify additional hazards that may be present for pregnant workers. The pregnant worker is encouraged to remain in contact with their personal physician.

- If no hazards exist for pregnant workers, the assessment concludes.
- If hazards exist for pregnant workers, proceed to step 2.

### STEP 2 Conduct hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA)

#### Key activities

- Conduct a hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA)
- Identify the work hazards present, including a review of current hazard identification and risk assessments and standard procedures in place
- If the hazard(s) of the specific work have not been previously assessed by completing a HIRA or equipment/activity-specific procedure (that includes the outcome of a HIRA), conduct a HIRA with reference to the [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#)
- Define the appropriate measures to effectively eliminate or mitigate identified hazards and risks using the appropriate methodology
- Send the assessment to their supervisor for their review and approval, address any issues they identify, and request approval prior to starting work

## Contextual Details

### *Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA)*

Supervisors of projects or in workspaces within uOttawa premises shall identify current and potential hazards at the site by using the HIRA process outlined in the [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#) site through a preliminary survey. The survey shall consult workers and relevant committee(s) to identify additional hazards that may be present.

Based on the findings of the preliminary hazard survey, identified hazards shall be addressed by:

1. Identifying existing assessments of the work hazard(s), reviewing the HIRA and the associated standard procedure to mitigate the hazard risks.
2. If an assessment or standard procedure does not exist already, conducting a HIRA using the process outlined in the [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#)

The assessment shall include an evaluation for hazards and risks to pregnant workers including, but not limited to:

- Type of work being conducted (including focus on reproductive hazards and risk)
  - Biological
    - Biological agents can be viruses, bacteria or parasites that may be used in the laboratories at the University, while others can be concealed in biological samples. Certain substances may cross the placental barrier resulting in infection, which can cause:
      - In-utero death or structural anomalies
      - Non-apparent infection after birth
      - No contaminationThe best protection against infectious agents is minimizing exposure, safe work practices, knowledge of the potential risks, having appropriate primary protection (e.g., vaccinations), and using personal protective equipment. For more information concerning specific biological agents, consult the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) or the [Biosafety Specialist](#).
  - Chemical
    - The consequences of exposing a pregnant worker to chemical products, such as solvents or metals, depend on the developmental stage of the embryo/fetus:
      - During the first three months: risks of structural anomalies (teratogenic effects)
      - After the first three months: teratogenic effects, functional anomaliesChemical products penetrate the human body through inhalation, absorption, ingestion, and injection. The product would need to cross the placental barrier to affect the embryo/fetus. Therefore, minimized exposure, safe work practices, knowledge of the potential risks, and use personal protective equipment are recommended.
  - Physical
    - Traditional physical risks, include lifting or transporting heavy objects, falling or slipping, excessive noise or dust, extreme temperatures, etc. In a laboratory

setting, ionizing radiation and x-rays may also be present. The average person receives approximately 0.125 rem of radiation per year from the environment or from common medical procedures. The three types of ionizing radiation found in the laboratories of the University are:

- Alpha – travels from 2-to-8 cm in the air and stopped by the skin.
- Beta – travels up to 10 m in the air and stopped by gloves or a few millimeters of flesh.
- Gamma and X-ray – can travel a few hundred meters in air and penetrate clothing to the body.

All workers at uOttawa are members of the public in terms of their maximum permissible radiation dose. There is no difference between the maximum amount of radioactivity that a pregnant worker can receive versus a non-pregnant worker. However, should questions arise, the pregnant worker may direct any questions to their supervisor, permit holder, and/or radiation safety officer (RSO). If necessary, the RSO will keep this information in confidence. For more information concerning radiation and its regulations, consult the [Radiation Safety Specialist](#) and/or the [Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission](#).

- Length of time that work will be done
- Location of work

Documentation shall meet the requirements outlined in the [General OHS Program Manual](#).

### STEP 3 Communicate with Health and Wellness

#### Key activities

- Contact Health and Wellness and follow the documented accommodation process

#### Contextual Details

When a medical accommodation is required, the worker contacts the [Health and Wellness](#) office to begin the accommodation process. The supervisor cooperates during this process. The pregnant worker will be accommodated, with a focus on equal opportunities, access, and benefits, up to undue hardship. A work plan will be established and may include (but is not limited to):

- Removal from the hazard zone(s)
- Reducing exposure times
- Assigning reasonably alternative work
- Etc.

All accommodations that are not medical in nature are managed by the immediate supervisor.