



Women of Child-bearing Age

Occupational Safety and Health Information

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant and you work with animals or their tissues at Virginia Tech, certain precautions may need to be taken during your pregnancy while working with research or teaching animals, biohazardous materials, chemical agents, gas anesthetic agents, or ionizing radiation. It is recommended that you discuss your pregnancy and your work environment (animal and/or hazardous materials exposure) that could affect your developing baby with your personal care physician or with the university's Occupational Physician as early as possible in case precautions need to be instituted. This allows planning of work assignments according to risk factors. You should submit a statement of advisories or restriction(s) from your personal physician or the Occupational Physician to your supervisor.

Chemicals

Working with hazardous agents and toxic chemicals is discouraged during the first trimester of pregnancy. Check with your personal physician or the university's Occupational Physician to discuss the chemicals you commonly use during your current duties so they are aware of potential problems

Infectious Diseases

Pregnant workers are at higher risk if they contract certain animal diseases, since treatment of the disease can be complicated by pregnancy and the disease may affect the developing fetus. The three agents listed below are the most common zoonotic agents which can affect the developing fetus. You can view more information on these agents and other agents in [Appendix C](#) of the university Infection Prevention Program and the [Occupational Safety and Health Program for Animal Handlers](#).

- Toxoplasmosis (cats)
- Q Fever (cattle, sheep, and goats)
- Chlamydia psittaci (pregnant sheep and cattle)

To minimize risk of exposure, pregnant women should scrupulously follow the work practices and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) outlined in the laboratory risk assessment and standard operating procedures. PPE will generally include the following at a minimum: a respirator or dust mask; disposable gloves; and a lab coat or disposable gown over your street clothes, or scrubs to be laundered on premise. Shoe covers (or shoes/ boots specifically used for husbandry/ lab areas) should be worn when entering rooms that house animals that are not in micro-isolators (such as dog, pig, sheep runs, and large animal stalls or barns) or if performing maintenance in animal husbandry rooms. It is important to remember not to accidentally rub your face or brush your hair back with contaminated gloves or sleeves of your lab coat or over gown, as this may provide direct contact of animal contaminations to your facial skin, eyes or mouth. If you need to wear a respirator or dust mask, you must be enrolled in the Occupational Health Assurance Program (OHAP); please contact Environmental, Health and Safety Services at 231-5985 or safety@vt.edu for information on the enrollment process.