

Guidelines for Pregnant Women Working in Laboratories

The following guidelines are provided for women who work in a laboratory environment and are pregnant, nursing, or are trying to become pregnant. It should be noted that the U.S. Supreme Court¹ has determined that a pregnant employee has the right to determine whether or not she continues in her present work environment while pregnant regardless of the hazards that may be present.

1. Creating and following proper laboratory, chemical hygiene, and biological safety procedures is critical in any lab environment. A robust chemical hygiene plan or biosafety plan and standard operating procedures provide the first line of defense for any lab employee.
2. The pregnant employee should start by listing all the hazards to which they might be exposed in the course of their own or a co-worker's work. Don't limit the list to chemical hazards only; many other hazards exist in the lab environment, such as radiation, biological materials, lifting of heavy objects, heat, fatigue, stress, etc.
3. Research the various materials used in the lab. Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are a good place to start your research but do not limit your research to one source. Additional, and often better, information on specific hazards can be found in a chemical dictionary, Prudent Practices in the Laboratory, the Centers for Disease Control website and others.
4. Discuss your list with your doctor or healthcare provider. In some cases it may be prudent to also discuss your concerns with an Occupational Medicine doctor – they have additional expertise in toxicology and other areas directly related to the work environment.
5. Discuss your list of concerns with your supervisor or Principal Investigator.
6. Discuss any recommendations made by your doctor with your supervisor.
7. Although it is not required, it is recommended that the supervisor attempt to accommodate the employee as much as possible. Labs have often made provisions where a person would temporarily have someone else carry out work with a particular agent or chemical. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the employee to determine whether or not they are willing to accept the risks associated with hazards in the laboratory.
8. Consult with Occupational and Environmental Health & Safety (OEHS) at 801-581-6590 to make sure that any steps taken to minimize the hazards are appropriate or if you have any questions.

¹

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, UAW, et al., v. Johnson Controls, Inc., No. 89-1215, Argued Oct. 10, 1990, Decided March 20, 1991.