

Health and safety during pregnancy

It is important to look after a pregnant worker's health during pregnancy. Pregnant workers have additional risks compared to other workers.

Employers and workers should:

- review risks
- talk about health and safety
- remove and reduce risks where possible

Assessing risks

By law, employers must assess the health and safety risks in their organisation.

This includes considering specific risks for workers of a childbearing age. This means those who:

- could become pregnant
- are pregnant
- are new mothers

Specific risks could include:

- work-related stress
- lifting and carrying heavy objects
- sitting or standing for long periods of time
- exposure to toxic chemicals and radioactive materials

Individual risk assessments

Employers must carry out an individual risk assessment when a worker tells them in writing that:

- they're pregnant
- they've given birth within the last 6 months
- they're breastfeeding

Employers should review the risk assessment regularly.

[Find out about risk assessments for pregnant workers and new mothers from the Health and Safety Executive](#)

Talking about health and safety

Once an employer knows someone is pregnant, they should talk with them regularly about health and safety.

During these discussions they should talk about:

- possible risks that might happen at different stages of pregnancy
- medical advice the worker has received
- the type of work they do

Removing and reducing risks

An employer must take steps to remove and reduce risks once they have identified them.

Sometimes the risks cannot be reduced or removed. In these cases, the employer must temporarily change the person's working conditions or hours if it is possible.

Offering suitable alternative work

For some jobs, it might not be possible to change someone's working conditions or hours. In these cases, employers must offer anyone with the [legal status of employee](#) suitable alternative work if it is available.

This work must be both:

- at the same rate of pay
- on terms that do not treat the employee any less favourably

Employers should consider offering suitable alternative work for someone who does not have the legal status of employee.

Example of agreeing other suitable work

Jean has a factory packing job that involves lifting heavy crates of food.

Jean tells their manager they're pregnant. It might not be safe to do heavy lifting while pregnant. So Jean is offered a temporary alternative job until they go on maternity leave. This job was found to be safe when the business did its health and safety risk assessment.

This job does involve packing but not heavy lifting. Jean's pay will remain the same. But the job is at a location 30 minutes further away from Jean's home.

Jean lets their manager know that this would mean extra travel time and costs. The terms of the alternative work are not as favourable. This means the organisation could be breaking the law.

After a discussion with HR, Jean's manager tells them that they will be paid for the extra travel. Jean's manager also agrees to treat the extra travel time as part of Jean's working time. This way Jean's working day will not be any longer.

As Jean's overall terms will now be as favourable as for Jean's usual job, they are likely to be within the law. Jean accepts this temporary job.

If someone does not want to do other suitable work

If someone does not want to do the other suitable work they've been offered, their employer should:

- explore with them why they do not want it
- work with them to find something else suitable

For example, someone might object because of health and safety reasons. The employer could find appropriate work by involving a health and safety representative, if there is one in the organisation.

If an employee refuses suitable alternative work without a valid reason, the employer could suspend them without pay.

When someone might need to be suspended on full pay

Sometimes the risks cannot be removed or reduced, and an employer cannot offer suitable alternative work.

In this case, an employer must suspend someone if they have the [legal status of employee](#). By law, the employee should still get full pay.

The suspension must last until either:

- their maternity leave begins
- it's safe for them to start work again

The employer must also give the employee:

- the outcome of the risk assessment
- the reason why the risks could not be removed

Employers should consider suspending someone with the [legal status of worker](#) on full pay.

If someone is an agency worker

An agency worker will usually tell the employment agency and the hiring organisation that they are pregnant.

The hiring organisation must carry out a risk assessment when an agency worker tells them in writing that they are pregnant. The risk assessment will check that the job is still safe for them to do. If it is not, the hiring organisation must remove or reduce the risk.

If it is not possible to make changes the agency must offer suitable alternative work to some people by law. This is when an agency worker has completed their '12-week minimum qualifying period'.

If there is no suitable alternative work, the agency must suspend the agency worker on full pay. This must be for the length of the original assignment.

If an agency worker refuses suitable alternative work without a valid reason, the agency does not have to pay them.

The agency should consider offering alternative work to someone who has not completed the 12-week qualifying period.

[Find out more about rights for agency workers after 12 weeks](#)

If someone is self-employed

An employer might hire someone who's pregnant and self-employed. In these cases the responsibility for their health and safety at work is shared.

The employer and the person who's self-employed should discuss what risk assessment they need. This will depend on the job they do.

Find out more about:

- [using contractors \(Health and Safety Executive\)](#)
- [advice for self employed workers \(Health and Safety Executive\)](#)

Get more advice and support

You can find out more about [protecting pregnant workers from the Health and Safety Executive](#).

Health and safety for pregnant workers can be a complicated area of the law. If an employer is unsure of their legal responsibility, they should [get legal advice](#).