

PREGNANCY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY

Adopted: 22nd July 2021 – Res No:156.7.21

Pregnancy is a time of great physical and emotional change that can lead to changes in the woman’s ability to perform and manage certain types of work. Our Vacation Care Service is committed to ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of pregnant staff by providing information, strategies, and ongoing support, as well as information about leave entitlements available to them.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 4: STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS		
4.1.2	Continuity of staff	Every effort is made for children to experience continuity of educators at the service.

QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP		
7.1.2	Management System	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
88	Infectious Disease Policy
168	Education and care service must have policies and procedures

RELATED POLICIES

Administration of Medication Policy Control of Infectious Diseases Policy Coronavirus (COVID-19) Management Policy Hand Washing Policy	Health and Safety Policy Immunisation Policy Work, Health and Safety Policy
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PURPOSE

Our Service is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all employees including pregnant workers. We understand that pregnancy can bring many changes to women’s ability to manage certain types of work, particularly at the later stages of pregnancy. We aim to work with all employees to negotiate a supportive working environment that will assist them to be healthy and productive members

of the workforce.

SCOPE

This policy applies to Staff and Management of the Vacation Care Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

The process and steps required to ensure a female employee's health and wellbeing during pregnancy will vary. For many female employees, variations to duties, equipment, and the work environment will not be necessary and usual duties may be performed for the duration of the employee's pregnancy. It is the responsibility of the female employee to raise and discuss any workplace concerns and/or issues with their Manager/Nominated Supervisor. However, there may be instances where the manager or Nominated Supervisor is required to exercise their duty of care to ensure the safety, protection and wellbeing of their staff.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The potential risk of injury or ill health will be discussed with staff members who are pregnant in accordance with the service's Health and Safety Policy and procedures. Where there is an identifiable risk associated with a pregnant employee's work, the Nominated Supervisor will consult with the employee to examine how the work can be modified to eliminate or minimise the risk.

- The Approved Provider/ Nominated Supervisor will maintain current information about their Workplace Health and Safety responsibilities to their employees and maintain a safe workplace for all employees.
- In regard to infectious diseases, the Approved Provider/ Nominated Supervisor will alert all staff to the potential risks to health that may arise through their employment at the Vacation Care Service
- Female Educators will be advised that they should have their immunity to Rubella, Measles, Chicken Pox and Cytomegalovirus (CMV) tested well before planning pregnancy.
- The Approved Provider will ensure pregnant Service staff are aware of health risks including:
 - exposure to specific infectious diseases or conditions that can have an adverse impact on pregnancy, including: Cytomegalovirus (CMV), Hand, foot & mouth disease, Human parvovirus B19 (erythema infectiosum, fifth disease), Listeriosis, Rubella (German measles), Measles, Hepatitis B, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), AIDS (Acquired

Immunodeficiency Syndrome, Pertussis (Whooping cough), Toxoplasmosis and Varicella (chickenpox)

- stress and burnout
- swollen feet and varicose veins
- heat stress
- cigarette smoke (outside smoke free zones.)
- chemicals and chemical fumes
- Implementing strategies which help reduce physical stress for pregnant Service staff, such as: - do less physical tasks
- Pregnant women should avoid contact with cat faeces, to minimise the risk of toxoplasmosis.

MANUAL HANDLING

To minimise the risk of back injury to pregnant Service staff and to comply with Health and Safety and other relevant legislation, we will:

- ensure pregnant Service staff are aware they are at more risk of back pain and injury from working while pregnant because of anatomical and physiological changes such as softening of ligaments and tendons, extra weight load, muscle fatigue, and tiredness.
- ensure pregnant Service staff are aware that the risk of back pain and injury increases with the progression of pregnancy and their ability to do physical work decreases
- advise pregnant staff to consult their doctor if they have any back pain or other health concerns during the pregnancy.
- ensure that pregnant staff are aware of the following strategies to reduce the risk of back pain and/or injury:
 - restrict lifting children or heavy equipment
 - ensure you use correct lifting and carrying techniques
 - diversify tasks to avoid prolonged standing
 - limit time standing in one position for too long
 - use footrests for raising feet when sitting
 - use suitable adult-height workbenches, desks and chairs
 - avoid bending over: Use your knees and hips to lower yourself to the children's level or when picking something up from a low level.
 - try to maintain a correct posture as the growing uterus can frequently cause postural problems.
 - use stepladders and trolleys as required

- ensure that heavy or awkward items are stored at an appropriate height and close to where they are needed

STRESS MANAGEMENT

To minimise the risk of stress and ensure pregnant Service staff have adequate opportunities for leave and holidays, we will:

- ensure pregnant Service staff are aware they are at more risk of stress at work because of changing abilities to meet usual work commitments.
- ensure pregnant Service staff are aware that the risk of stress at work might increase with the progression of the pregnancy.
- ensure pregnant Service staff are aware that they are legally required to take leave from work for a period before and after the pregnancy and should seek support from the Approved Provider/ Nominated Supervisor to arrange leave.
- assist pregnant Service staff with leave planning and provide current information to them about their conditions of employment and leave entitlements.
- advise pregnant Service staff to see their general practitioner/ obstetrician if they have any stress or other psychological or physiological health problems during pregnancy.

IMMUNISATION AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Due to constant close contact with children, staff in School Aged Care services may be at an increased risk of contracting some vaccine-preventable diseases. Authorities advise against pregnant women receiving live viral vaccines during pregnancy, or within 28 days prior to falling pregnant. Therefore, women of childbearing age should ensure that vaccinations are up to date. Common vaccine-preventable infections that may have an adverse effect on pregnancy include:

Rubella (German measles)

The greatest risk to the unborn baby occurs in the first twenty weeks of pregnancy, with a higher risk if the mother contracts Rubella in the first ten weeks. Employees planning pregnancy should have a blood test to ascertain immunity, as the vaccination must be given one month before becoming pregnant.

Measles

This is a highly infectious viral disease that can cause serious complications to the unborn child. It spreads through direct and indirect contact from contaminated people or surfaces. It can also remain in the air for up to two hours after the infected person has left. Employees can minimise the risk of infection by

paying particular attention to hand hygiene and ensuring that workers and children use correct cough and sneeze hygiene practises. Employees must also ensure that cleaning practises are being conscientiously followed throughout the centre. This vaccination is not recommended during pregnancy: the non-immune staff member should ensure that the vaccination has been received one month before falling pregnant.

NOTE: The vaccination for Rubella and Measles is given together in the MMR vaccination (Measles, mumps, and rubella).

Varicella (Chickenpox)

If exposed to varicella during the first three months of pregnancy the employee must seek medical advice. A blood test will reveal the mother's immune status. This vaccination is not recommended during pregnancy: the non-immune employee should ensure that the vaccination has been received one month before falling pregnant.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood and other bodily secretions. Adult vaccinations are available but should not be received during pregnancy. However, all babies born in Australia receive the Hepatitis B vaccination at birth as part of the National Immunisation Program Schedule. Employees must ensure that policies and National Health Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines are followed for managing exposure to blood and bodily fluids, including ensuring that children's wounds are covered appropriately.

Influenza

Influenza vaccinations are strongly recommended for pregnant women and can be safely given at any stage of the pregnancy. Vaccinating pregnant women also protects their infants from influenza in the first 6 months of life. (Australian Government Department of Health)

Pertussis (Whooping cough)

Pertussis can be a life-threatening disease for the newborn. It is recommended that the pregnant employee receive a pertussis vaccination in the third trimester of pregnancy as evidence indicates this is more beneficial to the newborn than receiving the vaccination prior to pregnancy.

Pregnant employees must also be aware of infections for which there are no vaccinations and take the necessary precautions. These infections include:

Cytomegalovirus (CMV)

CMV is spread through infected saliva and urine. Pregnant employees should therefore pay particular attention to hand hygiene, and where possible, minimise tasks that involve assisting in toileting, cleaning up toileting accidents or coming into contact with body secretions.

Hand, foot and mouth disease

Although the risk is minimal, employees who acquire this disease in late pregnancy can pass it to the unborn child. The worker should therefore pay particular attention to hand hygiene at all times.

Human parvovirus B19 (erythema infectiosum, fifth disease)

This virus can be transmitted to the unborn baby. Employees should therefore pay particular attention to hand hygiene at all times.

Listeriosis

Listeriosis is a bacterial infection that can be avoided by ensuring that raw or partially cooked foods are avoided during pregnancy, and thoroughly washing all fruit and vegetables in clean running water.

Toxoplasmosis

This disease is caused by a parasite that can be found in raw fruit and vegetables and spread by animals such as cats and birds. During pregnancy the parasite can pass through the placenta to the developing baby. A blood test can reveal if the mother is immune. The employee should pay attention to hand hygiene, avoid cleaning the sand pit (where there may be cat faeces) or bird cages, and should wash and peel fruit and vegetables.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome)

HIV is a virus that can lead to AIDS. Like Hepatitis B, these viruses are transmitted through blood and other bodily secretions. Employees must ensure that policies are followed for managing exposure to blood and bodily fluids, including ensuring that children's wounds are covered appropriately.

Source: *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services*, *The Australian immunisation handbook*, and NSW Health *Having a baby*.

THE APPROVED PROVIDER AND NOMINATED SUPERVISOR WILL:

- be as flexible as possible within the constraints of the workplace, to ensure the special needs of pregnant employees are considered and options to address their needs implemented wherever possible.
- provide medical practitioners with any requested information detailing the employee's duties, to assist the medical practitioner to assess the pregnant employee's fitness for work and consideration of alternative duties where applicable.
- alert all staff and families if a child or staff member contracts an infectious disease or virus such as coronavirus (COVID-19)
- recommend that pregnant staff members discuss concerns about the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) with their obstetrician or general practitioner
- ensure that all staff members are practising effective hand hygiene at all times
- ensure that all staff members are familiar with infection control policies and procedures and actively adhere to these at all times
- complete a risk assessment to identify any hazards or potential risks to pregnant staff members in the service
- put systems and strategies into place to address increased risk due to having a pregnant staff member in the workplace
- meet anti-discrimination law obligations by ensuring pregnant employees are not subjected to negative comments or remarks about their pregnancy
- negotiate with the pregnant employee to ensure a safe environment
- provide information to the employee's general practitioner, as requested, in regard to normal duties performed on a day-to-day basis
- meet anti-discrimination law obligations by ensuring pregnant workers employees are not subjected to negative comments or remarks about their pregnancy.

EMPLOYEES WILL:

- ensure the treating medical practitioner is aware of the specific work environment and activities that are undertaken on a day-to day basis.
- seek advice on infectious diseases relevant to pregnancy, personal immunity status for these diseases, and standard precautions for infection control
- access information relevant to infection control required throughout the pregnancy through [The Australian immunisation handbook](#).
- employees should inform management of their pregnancy as early as possible so that any potentially adverse risks can be averted, and alternative arrangements made if necessary

- immediately notify management of their pregnancy when medical and/or occupational health and safety issues are being experienced or where they may be reasonably foreseen.
- discuss occupational and workplace health and safety and/or medical concerns with a treating medical specialist and the Approved Provider/ Nominated Supervisor.
- obtain current medical documentation to support medical and/or occupational and workplace health and safety issues being experienced throughout the pregnancy.
- raise any grievances, issues, or concerns with management in accordance with relevant policies and procedures
- if the employee wishes to continue working past 6 weeks prior to the expected date of birth, they are required to provide a doctor's certificate confirming they are fit, and able to continue to work.
- our Vacation Care Service requires pregnant employees to raise any difficulties that they are experiencing in regard to performing their duties at the service with the Approved Provider/ Nominated Supervisor, so that potential risks to health can be avoided and quality childcare maintained.
- employees have a responsibility under Workplace Health and Safety legislation to take reasonable care to protect themselves (and others) in the workplace. This includes cooperating with the Approved Provider/ Nominated Supervisor on health and safety matters, such as taking appropriate precautions to avoid health risks during pregnancy.

SOURCE:

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).

Australian Government Department of Health *Australian Immunisation Handbook*

Australian Government Department of Health Coronavirus (COVID-19) health alert

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Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics. (2016).

Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth).

Fair Work Commission: <https://www.fwc.gov.au>

Fair Work Ombudsman: <http://www.fairwork.gov.au>

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Guide to the National Quality Standard. (2020).

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2012) (updated June 2013). *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services.*

NSW Health. (2016). *Handle with care: Looking after yourself in pregnancy.*

Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).

Safe Work Australia

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REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED: DECEMBER 2020	NEXT REVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 2021
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