

*Precautions to take during pregnancy, illness or decreased immunocompetence*

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ISU recognizes the need to protect the health, safety and welfare of faculty, staff, and students with illness, decreased immunocompetence, or who may become pregnant. Existing safety procedures should be followed. In addition, this guideline outlines precautions that should be taken during pregnancy, illness, or decreased immunocompetence.

Impairment of the Immune System

The risk of contracting a disease from animals is minimal. However, individuals with an impaired immune system, due to medication or disease, may be at significantly greater risk. It is important that the University be apprised of factors such as this that could adversely influence human health.

The Animal Facilities Manager must inform the person of risks from specific workplace hazards in the event that person becomes ill, immunocompromised, or pregnant before they begin working with new or existing biological, chemical, and radiological material in the laboratory.

Faculty, staff and students who intend on becoming pregnant, are pregnant or breastfeeding and working with or near specific workplace hazards should:

- advise their supervisor;
- conduct a risk assessment before working with or near workplace hazards; and
- seek medical expertise from their healthcare provider in relation to specific workplace hazards such as the use of a particular biological, chemical, or radiological material.

The TSO and the Animal Facilities Manager should perform a risk assessment once the person informs their supervisor that they may be ill, immunocompromised, become pregnant, are pregnant or breastfeeding. The IACUC, and/or veterinarian should review and approve the risk assessment and TSO's recommendations for precautionary measures.

Pregnancy Status and Toxoplasmosis Screening

Toxoplasmosis is a widespread disease of animals and humans. In both, the disease is usually asymptomatic and of no serious consequence. However, the fetus of a pregnant woman is at great risk. Infection during pregnancy may result in miscarriage, stillbirth, or severe morbidity in newborns. It is thought that an important mode of transmission is by human exposure to oocysts (a form of the infectious agent) in cat feces. There is no practical, simple test to determine which cats may be shedding the organism. As a result, the participant should consider exposure to any cat a potential threat to the pregnant woman. Pregnant researchers are advised to speak to their supervisors about working with cats during their pregnancies. All persons, regardless of sex, who normally work with cats, will be scheduled to have their blood checked for antibodies against the disease.

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There are many occupational health hazards and disease risks associated with laboratory animal researchers. In particular, when a researcher is pregnant, there are many risks that could be detrimental to the researcher and her baby. Constant awareness of potential injuries and risks is essential for the well being of the researcher and her unborn baby. Preventive measures should be incorporated into the daily routine, which include the use of procedures that reduce the risks of injury.

1. Pregnant employees or those planning to become pregnant should contact their obstetrician/gynecologist immediately and specify that they work with vertebrate animals.
2. Most importantly, wash hands after work is done and before leaving the laboratory. If possible, shower and change clothes if facilities are available before leaving the laboratory.
3. Toxoplasmosis infection during pregnancy can result in miscarriage, stillbirth, or severe diseases in the newborn. Therefore, pregnant employees who have had no prior exposure to toxoplasmosis should be informed of the risks involved with exposure to cats, and should consult with the principal investigator about alternative work assignments if necessary.
4. All other animals that the pregnant researcher is in contact with should be discussed with her obstetrician/gynecologist to find out about all associated risks involved in working with the animals.
5. Lifting heavy animals, moving equipment, and using chairs or any equipment inappropriately can result in lumbosacral injury. Pregnant employees especially should have access to the use of equipment that minimizes human muscle power to carry out a task.
6. Personal protective equipment such as a gown, gloves, goggles, and if necessary, respiratory protection should be worn when working in the laboratory.
7. Engineering controls such as proper ventilation (hood, biological safety cabinet, etc.) are required for a safe laboratory environment.
8. Work surfaces should be decontaminated on a routine basis to prevent the researcher from inadvertently getting substances on skin, hair, or clothes.

It is imperative that knowledge, awareness, and good practices are reinforced constantly to prevent injuries and illnesses while working with laboratory animals.