



# Pregnancy Workplace Hazards in Veterinary Medicine



## RADIATION

**Key Takeaways:** The risk to pregnancy in practice is fairly low but varies depending on the type and dose of radiation.

- ➔ Follow ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) principles.
- ➔ Use proper personal protective equipment (PPE).
- ➔ Avoid radiographic exposure during pregnancy or take extra precautions (e.g., wearing a fetal dosimeter under PPE to monitor the fetal radiation dose throughout pregnancy).



## DRUGS AND CHEMICALS

**Key takeaways:** Chemotherapeutic agents and some other drugs should either be avoided or used with caution.

- ➔ **Chemotherapeutic agents** target rapidly growing cells in many cases, which can affect rapidly dividing embryonic cells.
  - The risk is highest during the first trimester.
  - If working with chemotherapy drugs, follow strict safety precautions and wear impermeable PPE.
- ➔ **Other drugs that should be avoided completely or used with caution**, including taking careful precautions to avoid accidental auto-injection or any contact with the skin, mucous membranes, or open wounds:
  - Prostaglandins and other hormones
  - Methimazole
  - Sileo (dexmedetomidine oral gel)
  - Clevor (ophthalmic solution)
  - Solensia
  - Librela



## INFECTIOUS DISEASES

**Key takeaways:** Toxoplasmosis is the most known infectious disease that poses a threat to pregnancy in humans, but handling and treating cats is low risk for this organism because:

- Infected cats only shed oocysts intermittently.
  - Those oocysts take at least 24 to 48 hours to become infective after a cat has defecated.
- ➔ The best protection against toxoplasmosis is to practice regular hand washing.



### Exercise extreme caution or avoid contact

with animals who have recently experienced a spontaneous abortion or who are otherwise suspected of having these infections.

- *Brucella spp.*
- *Listeria monocytogenes*
- *Coxiella burnetii* (Q Fever)

## ANESTHESIA

**Key takeaways:** The proper use of a working scavenger reduces the risks associated with waste anesthetic gas (WAG) exposure by up to 90%.

- ➔ Regularly check the entire anesthesia circuit for leaks.
- ➔ Pregnant individuals should avoid:
- Intubating
  - Extubating
  - Mask or chamber inductions
  - Disconnecting the patient from the anesthesia machine frequently
  - Spending time recovering the patient from anesthesia
- ➔ Some individuals may choose to wear an organic vapor respirator, but this does not replace the need to practice other precautions.

## INJURIES AND ERGONOMIC HAZARDS

**Key takeaways:** The most common types of injuries in veterinary practices include falls, bites, scratches, needlestick injuries, and motor vehicle accidents.

- ➔ Even minor injuries and ergonomic stresses such as lifting, bending, and standing or sitting for long periods of time can contribute to increased pain and other pregnancy complications.
- ➔ Pregnant people should take extra precautions to avoid falls, use careful patient selection, and make efforts to avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time without taking breaks.
- ➔ Safety precautions include:
- Using proper physical and chemical restraint.
  - Practicing Fear Free techniques.
  - Using caution when recapping needles.
  - Always wearing a seatbelt.

## STRESS AND FATIGUE

**Key takeaways:** Some studies show that severe stress can affect fertility and increase the risk of adverse pregnancy events such as pregnancy loss and preterm labor. Fatigue is a common symptom during pregnancy for many reasons.

- ➔ Pregnant individuals should be given opportunities throughout the day to sit and rest, to take a walk, or whatever is needed.
- ➔ The risk may be reduced by not working more than two overnight shifts per week.
- ➔ Supportive workplace culture and psychological safety help reduce stress.
- ➔ Prioritizing sleep, staying hydrated, and eating frequent nutritious meals may help reduce fatigue.

Read the full article at [aaha.org/newstat](https://aaha.org/newstat)

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