

Pregnancy and work: risks for the unborn child, recommendations for improving the protection of pregnant women at work

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■ Pregnant women at work: job-specific hazards

- ▶ Reprotoxic chemicals (cytostatics, anaesthetics, etc.)
- ▶ Infectious agents
- ▶ Ionising radiation
- ▶ Physical activities (carrying loads, etc.)
- ▶ Noise
- ▶ Night work
- ▶ Etc.

Is the unborn child sufficiently protected? Which prevention measures should be implemented?


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Pregnancy: a waiting period and the risks that go with it


- ▶ In the vast majority of cases, the child is born healthy.
- ▶ But there may be negative outcomes:
 - > Extrauterine pregnancy
 - > Spontaneous abortion
 - > Foetal death
 - > Congenital deformity
 - > Intrauterine growth retardation
 - > Premature births
- ▶ Frequent work absences

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An "Experts' Opinion" coordinated by INRS

- ▶ "Pregnancy and work: the risks for the unborn child"
- ▶ A review of knowledge on occupational risks: literature analysis
- ▶ Recommendations



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Why an "Experts' Opinion"?


- Frequent requests for information about exposure risks during pregnancy
- Numerous emergency situations
- Lack of stable scientific data to respond to requests
- The social importance of the issue
- How to respond?
 - Should the precautionary principle be applied if the data is not dependable?

Drawing on a group of experts

Focus on risks for the unborn child



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Bibliographical study

- ▶ by risk: chemical risks, physical activity, ionising radiation, electromagnetic fields, noise, vibration, thermal constraints, organisational factors, biological risks
- ▶ by profession: health sector jobs, work involving contact with animals, laboratory personnel, early childhood jobs, agricultural activities, etc.

➡ Proven risks or risks discussed in epidemiological studies

➡ But manageable risks

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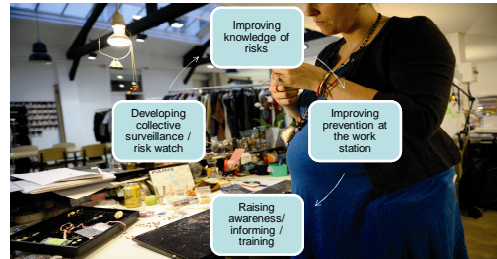
■ Before recommendations are issued, five general principles must be followed

- The need to protect the unborn child
- Non-discrimination against women in the labour market
- Priority to the improvement of work stations rather than suspending pregnant workers
- Taking precariousness into account
- Focusing prevention actions on micro enterprises and SMEs

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■ And proposals for improving knowledge and protection of pregnancy in the workplace



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Improving knowledge of risks

Difficulty in assessing risks due to lack of data: on hazards, exposure, dose-effect relationships

Create a national or international research programme on the impact of work on pregnancy or mainstream this issue into current research programmes

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Developing collective surveillance / risk watch

Lack of data on the course of pregnancies in the "work environment"

Develop population surveillance using existing public health resources (register of deformities, perinatal death certificates, analysis of work leaves, etc.)

Create an observatory on the impact of occupational risks on births with occupational physicians (enhanced medical surveillance, return to work after pregnancy, etc.)

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Improving prevention at the work station

Prevention officers working in isolation
Heterogeneous practices
Lack of reference systems

Create a reference group and a network of experts for the development of occupational risk prevention with regard to human reproduction

Objectives:

- Develop job-specific pregnancy risk assessment tools
- Harmonise assessment tools
e.g.: indicators of hard work conditions, recommendations for physical load assessment, etc.

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Improving prevention at the work station

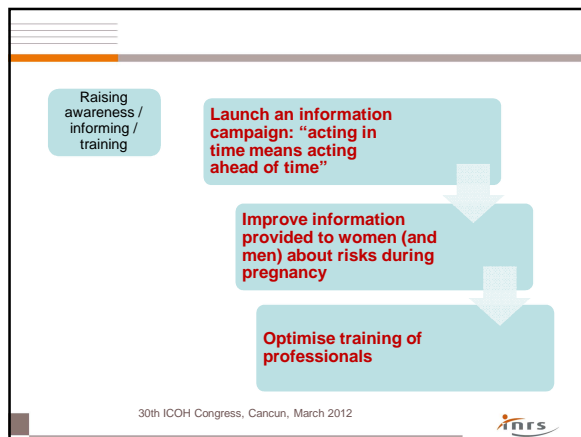
Public health specialists and gynaecologists are not very familiar with the issue of occupational risk

Develop interdisciplinary work particularly in networks

Initiate collaboration between occupational physicians and pregnancy practitioners
Develop specialised consultations

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Conclusion

- There are numerous pregnancy hazards in the workplace but it is often possible to stop them from becoming risks.
- However, organisational, financial and cultural obstacles are frequent.
- Improving the protection of pregnant women at work requires:
 - Prioritisation of this issue in occupational health
 - Pluridisciplinary networking
 - Improved awareness of employers, employees, pregnancy practitioners and prevention experts

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