

# Healthy Pregnancy

## Background Information/Rationale for Focus

New and expectant parents represent a large percentage of the workforce. In Canada, women make up almost half (47%) of the workforce; over 75 per cent of these women are in their prime childbearing years.<sup>1</sup> Eight out of ten women will become pregnant during their working years.<sup>2</sup> Most of these women continue to work during pregnancy with approximately 90 per cent of new Canadian mothers returning to work after one year.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, 64 per cent of women with children less than 3 years of age were employed.<sup>1</sup>

While in general it is quite safe for a pregnant woman to continue working during pregnancy, a supportive and safe work environment can create healthier employees, which can lead to healthier pregnancies. It is worthwhile to note that many women often wait until their pregnancy is well established before disclosing. Since the most sensitive period of time for a developing fetus is 17 to 56 days after conception, workplaces should not wait until they have a pregnant worker to put in place health education, policies and practices that support healthy pregnancies. Workplace health protection and preventative policies can not only help to reduce potential risks to women, but can also aid to protect male fertility and their ability to father healthy children.<sup>2, 6</sup>



Women who experience pregnancy complications will have higher rates of absenteeism and those who give birth to a low birth weight (birth weight less than 2500 grams), preterm (birth that happens before 37 weeks in pregnancy) or sick baby are likely to delay returning to work after parental leave in order to manage their infant's care. These small, premature babies are at much greater risk of hospitalization in their first year of life and often have disabilities that affect them throughout their lives.<sup>4</sup> Low maternal weight prior to conception, poor nutrition, high levels of stress, exposure to tobacco smoke and excessive heat during pregnancy have all been associated with an increased risk of low birth weight and preterm birth.<sup>5</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that prolonged standing, excessive noise and heavy lifting may be linked to low birth weight.<sup>2</sup>

### **Work-life Balance and Family Friendly Policies:**

Creating a safe reproductive health environment within the workplace is not the only consideration for employers; employers are encouraged to also consider the impact that pregnancy and adjustment to a new family will have on their employees work-life balance. Work-life conflicts may arise that have an impact on productivity, workplace equity and public and occupational health.<sup>7</sup> Research indicates that flexible work

# Healthy Pregnancy

arrangements, increasing employees' sense of control, making work demands and work expectations more realistic and increasing the number of supportive managers have an impact on both business and employees. It is however important to realize that supportive management is key. Data shows that managers are, through their behaviours, the transmitters of culture within their organization and the ones who make employees believe that they are able to exert some degree of control over their work schedule.<sup>8</sup>

Workplaces that implement family friendly policies note:

- Employees using flexible work arrangements have lower absenteeism<sup>9</sup>;
- Consumer/client satisfaction increases after the implementation of work-life initiatives<sup>9</sup>;
- Management's recognition of the importance of personal and family life issues, directly impacts employee commitment<sup>9</sup>;
- Employees who use flexible work arrangements show greater motivation and initiative<sup>9</sup>; and,
- Work-life balance policies act as incentives to recruitment<sup>7</sup>.

## Goals For The Workplace To Strive For

1. To increase awareness of
  - i. the importance of preparing for pregnancy
  - ii. factors which support a healthy pregnancy
  - iii. work-life balance principles
2. To provide skill building opportunities enabling employees to make healthy choices before pregnancy and during pregnancy.
3. To provide a supportive and safe work environment to promote healthy lifestyles throughout the reproductive health years, including preconception (before pregnancy) and during pregnancy.
4. To develop and implement policies which reduce potential health risks or health hazards within the work environment and support family friendly initiatives.
5. To encourage active and supportive communication between employers and employees who may be planning a pregnancy or who are pregnant, while maintaining confidentiality.

## Getting Started

### **Workplace Wellness Team, Environmental Scan and Needs Assessment**

- Create a workplace wellness team, which includes employees and management to gauge your workers needs and interests;

# Healthy Pregnancy

- Complete an environmental scan to determine how supportive the workplace is regarding healthy eating and physical activity;
- Conduct a needs assessment to determine what healthy living initiatives are important to employees; and,
- Based on the results of your environmental scan and needs assessment, consult with the workplace wellness team to decide which interventions fit with the requirements of your workplace.

## **Awareness Raising**

- Utilize bulletin boards and displays featuring resources for a healthy pregnancy and preconception (planning for pregnancy);
- Dedicate an accessible area to display pamphlets and resources regarding healthy lifestyle issues, preconceptional health promotion and healthy pregnancy;
- Provide employees with a list of relevant community events, resources and videos available through the Region of Waterloo Public Health Resource Centre and local libraries;
- Include short articles/quizzes in an internal newsletter or e-bulletin/staff e-mails or as a paycheck insert (check websites and local newspaper for relevant articles); and,
- Post information related to paternal and maternity leaves, benefits, etc.

## **Skill Building**

- Offer presentations/workshops based on employee interest through “lunch and learn” sessions discussing issues of preconception and prenatal health; and,
- Provide employees and management with the opportunity to attend training/courses related to reproductive health/healthy pregnancies.

## **Creating a Supportive Environment**

- Encourage walking groups
- Provide a quiet room/environment for pregnant mothers to rest during breaks;
- Offer preferred parking spaces for pregnant employees;
- Offer healthy food choices in the cafeteria or vending machines, including availability of water;
- Provide smoking cessation support;
- Offer flexible work scheduling allowing employees to attend prenatal/health appointments;
- Have available free pagers on loan to expectant fathers;
- Provide on-site childcare; and,
- Offer counseling services (e.g. Employee and Family Assistance Program).

## **Healthy Workplace Policy Suggestions**

- Develop flex time/flexible scheduling policies for employees to attend medical appointments for both the pregnant worker and her partner as well;

# Healthy Pregnancy

- Investigate the feasibility of creating a maternity/paternity leave policy, including flexible options, financial top-ups and extended leaves;
- Develop job share/part-time policies;
- When feasible, offer alternative work assignments if a pregnant worker is involved with heavy lifting, strenuous work, shift work or long hours of work;
- Provide uniforms/protective clothing to fit pregnant employees; and,
- Adhere to WHMIS/MSDS policy, with regular in-services for employees and managers on organizational safety guidelines.



Telephone consultation is available through **Project Health: 519-883-2287**

## Region of Waterloo Public Health Resources

***Project Health Resources: (call Project Health phone line @ 519-883-2287)***

Lunch and Learn:

Planning Your Pregnancy

Pamphlets/Fact Sheets/Books:

*For employers:*

How to be a Family Friendly Workplace – Policies and Practices that Help Families (2008)

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc\\_health/pdf/preg\\_work\\_16pg\\_FNL.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc_health/pdf/preg_work_16pg_FNL.pdf)

Services for Women who are Pregnant or Parenting Involved with Alcohol and/or Drugs

*For employees:*

Coping with Pregnancy Loss (a resource listing)

How Your Baby Grows

Involved Fathers – A Guide for Today's Dad

Life with a New Baby is not always what you expect

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/ppmd/ppmd\\_bro\\_eng\\_lr.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/ppmd/ppmd_bro_eng_lr.pdf)

Pregnancy and the Flu Shot

Preparing Your Toddler for a Second Baby

Waiting for Baby: Pregnancy after Age 35

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep\\_health/pdf/pregnancy35plus\\_12pg\\_book.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep_health/pdf/pregnancy35plus_12pg_book.pdf)

You and Your Baby (Violence Prevention)

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/anti-violence/pdf/youandyourbaby\\_PF\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/anti-violence/pdf/youandyourbaby_PF_Eng.pdf)

Posters:

Abuse and Pregnancy

Be Safe: Have An Alcohol-Free Pregnancy

Involved Fathers...Connect Earlier Than Ever  
**Project Health Resources: (cont'd)**  
Is There a Baby in Your Future? Plan for it.  
Pregnancy and Work  
Preterm Labour

**Displays:**

Environmental Health and Reproduction – Playing it Safe  
Preconception – Is a Baby in Your Future?  
Healthy Pregnancy  
    A Kitchen With Heart  
    Active Living During Pregnancy  
    Becoming a Father  
    Caring for Two  
    Is it Safe for my Baby? (Substance Use)  
    It Can't Be Time Yet!  
    Pregnancy and Work  
    Testing: Testing, Testing 1,2,3  
    Your Changing Body  
    Your Growing Baby

**Other Services:**

Phone consultation for healthy pregnancy policy development

**Public Health Resource Centre:**

To borrow teaching kits/books/video resources please call: 519-883-2256  
To order pamphlets: e-mail [phrc@region.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:phrc@region.waterloo.on.ca) or call the automated order line at: 519-883-2374 or order online at [www.region.waterloo.on.ca/ph](http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/ph) -- Resources/Resource Centre/Pamphlets

**Teaching Kits:**

Empathy Belly

**Video Resources:**

*For Employers:*

You Can Help Pregnant Smokers Quit – The 5 A's Counseling Method DVD

*For Employees:*

*Pregnancy:*

Preparing for Parenthood – I Am Your Child Video series (2005) DVD  
Stop Smoking Now: Reasons Not to Smoke When You're Pregnant – I Am Your Child - Video series VHS/DVD

## *Labour and Birth:*

Comfort Measures for Childbirth (2008) DVD  
Miracle of Birth VHS/DVD  
The Stages of Labour VHS/DVD  
Tried and True (2000) DVD  
Works of Wonder VHS/DVD

## *Fathers:*

To Be a Father - I Am Your Child Video series (2005) VHS/DVD

## *Newborn Care:*

News About Newborns VHS/DVD  
The First Years Last Forever - I Am Your Child Video series VHS/DVD

## *Books:*

The Resource Centre's Reproductive Health book collection is quite extensive including books addressing preconception, pregnancy, fathering and labour & birth. Call 519-883-2256 for a complete up to date listing.

## *Pamphlets/Fact Sheets:*

For a complete list of current pamphlets available through the Resource Centre, refer to the online order form.

A Guide to Eating Fish for Women, Children and Families

Active Pregnancy

Coping with Nausea and Vomiting in Pregnancy\*

Emotional Changes in Pregnancy\*

Folic Acid

Healthy Eating for a Healthy Baby\*

Promoting a Comfortable Pregnancy\*

Services for Pregnant Women in Waterloo Region

The Sensible Guide to Healthy Pregnancy

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/pdf/hpguide-eng.pdf>

Work & Pregnancy Do Mix

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc\\_health/pdf/Workplace\\_Print\\_Friendly.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc_health/pdf/Workplace_Print_Friendly.pdf)

\*To download copies of these pamphlets and factsheets visit:

<http://www.projecthealth.ca/menu-services/pamphlets>

## Information and Community Resources

Reproductive Health On-Call Line .....	519-883-2267
Prenatal Health Fairs .....	519-883-2308
Special Delivery Club - Prenatal Classes for Youth .....	519-621-6110
Healthy Children Info Line .....	519-883-2245
Preparing for Parenthood: Prenatal Information and Support Program for Pregnant Women - Ontario Early Years Centres	
YMCA Ontario Early Years Centre .....	519-741-8585
Our Place Family Resource & Early Years Centre .....	519-571-1626
Conestoga College Prenatal to Parenting Group Prenatal Classes ...	519-748-5220 ext.3656
YMCA Childbirth Education Program .....	519-741-8585
Prebirth Service	
Grand River Hospital .....	519-749-4300 ext.2793
Cambridge Memorial Hospital .....	519-621-2333 ext.4355
Doula Care .....	1-888-879-3199
Telehealth .....	1-866-797-0000
Motherisk Information Line .....	1-416-813-6780
Fathering Group - K-W Counselling Services .....	519-884-0000

## Internet Resources

[www.projecthealth.ca](http://www.projecthealth.ca)

### Best Start

<http://www.beststart.org>

<http://www.beststart.org/resources/index.html#display> (displays available on loan)

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep\\_health/index.html](http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep_health/index.html) (downloadable reproductive health resources)

### Best Start - Before Pregnancy

<http://www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca>

### Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

<http://www.ccohs.ca>

### Health Canada

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

### Human Resources and Skills Development Canada - Creating a Family-Friendly Workplace (Culture Change).

[http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/lp/spila/wlb/imt/08family\\_friendly.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/lp/spila/wlb/imt/08family_friendly.shtml)

A variety of examples of work-life balance initiatives

[http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/lp/spila/wlb/rtm/07chapter\\_4.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/lp/spila/wlb/rtm/07chapter_4.shtml)

# Healthy Pregnancy

LA Best Babies Network – Pregnancy and Family Friendly Workplace Policies  
[http://www.breastfeedingtaskforla.org/LABBN\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_030607.pdf](http://www.breastfeedingtaskforla.org/LABBN_Policy_Brief_030607.pdf)

Maternity/Paternal Leave Benefits Information  
<http://www.canadabenefits.gc.ca>

Motherisk  
<http://www.motherisk.org>  
Information on reproductive risk or safety of drugs, chemicals and maternal disease in pregnancy

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health  
<http://www.cdc.gov/NIOSH>

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers  
<http://www.ohcow.on.ca>

Ontario Human Rights Commission  
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca>

Ontario Ministry of Labour – Pregnancy and Parental Leave  
[http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/guide/guide\\_11.html](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/guide/guide_11.html)

Pregnets  
<http://www.pregnets.org>

Ottawa Public Health – Policy: The Key to a Healthy Workplace – A Guide to Making Your Organization Healthier  
[http://ottawa.ca/residents/health/environments/workplace/healthy/policy\\_manual\\_en.pdf](http://ottawa.ca/residents/health/environments/workplace/healthy/policy_manual_en.pdf)

Region of Waterloo Public Health - Prenatal Health Fairs  
<http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/4f4813c75e78d71385256e5a0057f5e1/41318e572d45fbdd85256b1300710834!OpenDocument>

Region of Waterloo Public Health – Reproductive Health Program  
<http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/c56e308f49bfeb7885256abc0071ec9a/d6c4e8d40a250e5e85256b13006dbbea!OpenDocument>

Public Health Agency of Canada – Healthy Pregnancy  
<http://www.healthypregnancy.gc.ca>

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada  
<http://www.sogc.org>

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Statistics Canada. (2006). *Women in Canada: Work chapter updates*. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.ca/start.html>
- <sup>2</sup>Best Start: Ontario's Maternal Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre. (2001). *Workplace reproductive health – Research & strategies*. Toronto: ON. Retrieved from: [http://www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc\\_health/pdf/WorkplaceDocum.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/wrkplc_health/pdf/WorkplaceDocum.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup>Statistics Canada. (2007). *Returning to the Job After Childbirth. Perspectives*. Catalogue no.75-001-X1E. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2007112/article/10467-eng.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup>LA Best Babies Network. (2007). *Pregnancy and family friendly workplace policies*. Retrieved from: [http://www.labestbabies.org/pdf/LABBN\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_030607.pdf](http://www.labestbabies.org/pdf/LABBN_Policy_Brief_030607.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup>Best Start. (1998). *Prevention of low birth weight in Canada: Literature review and strategies*. Retrieved from: [http://www.beststart.org/resources/lbw\\_aware/pdf/lbw\\_aware/lbw\\_rpt/lbw98TOC.html](http://www.beststart.org/resources/lbw_aware/pdf/lbw_aware/lbw_rpt/lbw98TOC.html)
- <sup>6</sup>Health Canada. (2009). *Hazard-specific issues – Substances assessed for reproductive and developmental hazards*. Retrieved from: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>
- <sup>7</sup>CAALL Ad Hoc Committee on Work-Life Balance. (2002). *Work-Life balance: A report to ministers responsible for labour in Canada*. Retrieved from: <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/lp/spila/wlb/pdf/wlbc-ctvpc-en.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup>Health Canada. (2009). *Work-Life conflict in Canada in the new millennium: Key findings and recommendations from the 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study*. Retrieved from: [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/balancing\\_six-equilibre\\_six/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/balancing_six-equilibre_six/index-eng.php)
- <sup>9</sup>Centre for Families, Work & Well-Being. (2000). *Work life practices and flexibility in small businesses: A Canadian research report*. Retrieved from: [http://www.worklifecanada.ca/cms/resources/files/2/small\\_businesses1.pdf](http://www.worklifecanada.ca/cms/resources/files/2/small_businesses1.pdf)

