

A Guide for Anaesthesia Staff during Pregnancy

Negotiating your way through the maze of paperwork surrounding rights and benefits on maternity leave and pay can be difficult to fit in between antenatal appointments, work and preparing for a new arrival.

This advisory aims to clarify some of the main issues facing pregnant anaesthesiologists and provide guidance on your rights, your responsibilities and those of your employer. The advice outlined below is based on the best evidence, currently available.

Ensure that your rota maker, tutor and or line manager are aware of your pregnancy, It is important to pass on any specific advice given to you by your GP, Obstetrician or midwife.

Potential occupational risks:

Anaesthetic gases:

With the advent of scavenging, the risks associated with exposure to anaesthetic gases for pregnant staff has been reduced.ⁱ

A systematic review published in 2023 concluded that the administration of inhalational anaesthesia, especially with gas extraction systems (scavenging systems) and the adequate ventilation of anaesthesia or operating rooms, is not associated with an increased incidence of spontaneous abortion or congenital malformation.ⁱⁱ

Radiation^{iiiiv}

The Ionising Radiations Regulations Act of 2019 states that occupational exposure to ionising radiation should be limited so that the dose to the unborn child is as low as reasonably achievable and unlikely to exceed 1 millisievert. (One CXR is approximately 0.1 millisievert).^v

In general, pregnant anaesthesia staff should avoid working in the Cardiac Cath Lab, endovascular theatre and other areas which use continuous screening and where nuclear medicines are used e.g. sentinel node biopsy.^{vi}

Single shot radiographs taken from 2 meters away or while wearing 5 mm lead aprons are generally considered safe while pregnant. MRI is generally considered safe during pregnancy.

Infection

Check your immunity to varicella zoster (chickenpox) e.g. at one of your obstetric appointments.
Pregnant anaesthesia staff should avoid exposure to the following infections^{vii viii}

- Varicella zoster – chickenpox
- Parvo B19
- Rubella
- Hepatitis B
- Cytomegalovirus
- HIV
- Adeno- associated virus 2
- Herpes
- Tuberculosis
- Syphilis
- Typhoid
- COVID 19

Cytotoxics

Pregnant anaesthesia staff should not be involved in the administration or disposal of the following drugs:

Cytotoxic drugs, immunosuppressive agents and prostaglandin analogues

On call

Discontinuing on-call duties is a decision made on the basis of symptoms and risk assessment.

Whenever an anaesthesia staff member feels they need to stop call, they should consult with their Occupational Health Department to discuss a stop date.

On call provisions should be discussed with your Tutor, rota maker and / or line manager before entering your third trimester.

HSE Guidelines

The below guidelines apply to those currently pregnant, fourteen weeks post-partum or breast-feeding up to child's second birthday.

Employee should inform their employer of pregnancy and any advice from doctor or midwife as soon as is practical.

Employer should perform risk assessment [Pregnant employee risk assessment.](#)^{ix}

Risk identification, implement control measures, which include: ^x

Step 1. Adjusting the working conditions and or hours of work.

Step 2. Providing the employee with suitable alternative work.

Step 3. Approving up to 21 days of paid Health and Safety leave for the employee under section 18 of Maternity Protection Act 1994, if risks cannot be reasonably controlled with step 1 or 2.

Breast feeding^{xi}

You are considered a breast feeding employee if you are breast feeding on your return to work until your child's second birthday. You can take 1 hour with pay off work each day to breastfeed.

Maternity pay^{xii}

You may be entitled to maternity benefit, depending on your pay-related social insurance contributions (PRSI). Maternity benefit as of 2025 is €274 for 26 weeks. This may be supplemented by your employer, you should seek confirmation from your local HR department.

^{xiii}. Applications for maternity benefit should be completed at least 6 weeks in advance of starting your maternity leave.

Employees can either complete the [MB1 form](#)^{xiv} and post the completed MB1 form to Maternity Benefit Section, Social Welfare Services Office, Department of Social Protection, McCarter's Road, Buncrana, Co.Donegal.

Or

apply through [mywelfare.ie](#)^{xv}- you will need a verified MyGovID account.

The Employer should complete an [MB2 form](#).^{xvi}

It may be worthwhile entering your own maternity leave dates and then sending this form to your employer to avoid any confusion.

All pregnant employees can take maternity leave for at least 26 weeks. You are required to inform your employer a minimum of 4 weeks before the start of your maternity leave. Your maternity leave must start at least 2 weeks before your estimated due date and you should take at least 4 weeks maternity leave after the birth of your baby.

Implications for Training

Leave Entitlements

Pregnant employees are entitled to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave xvii(maternity benefit) with an optional additional unpaid maternity leave (up to 16 weeks). Employees on maternity leave are treated as though still at work; during this time pension is accrued and employees retain public holidays and annual leave entitlements.

Trainees should inform the Training Department of the CAI of their intention to take maternity leave at the earliest opportunity. Applications for leave are made through the RISR e-portfolio for training ***under the 'Trainee Leave' form^{xviii}***.

Parental Leave

If trainees wish to take Parental Leave, they must first seek approval from their training site. If approved, then they must notify the Directors of Training regarding the terms of their parental leave. Additional training time will be required by these trainees at the end of their training to make up any training time missed.

In exceptional circumstances where a trainee takes a period of leave up to 3 months within a six month rotation period, they will receive credit for the full six months, provided they have completed a minimum of 3 months of the appropriate on call duties. This can only be taken once during the full 6 year training programme. If any additional period of leave is taken after this time, there is no further credit allowed and the CSCST date is extended accordingly. This rule does not incorporate Flexible Training.

Return to Programme

When preparing to return to training the trainee should confirm with the Training Department their intention to return to Programme at least 8 weeks before the planned return date. The Training Department will confirm the planned rotation at least six months in advance. The trainee is required to contact the tutor in advance of the return date to arrange a meeting to discuss plans

for the trainee's return to the clinical environment. It is highly recommended that the trainee does not do on call for at least the first two weeks. All CAI Tutors will be informed of this recommendation. Trainees returning from maternity leave are recommended to attend the CAI Return to Programme course which usually takes place in person in the College, prior to change over in July. If trainees are returning outside of this timeframe they will be provided with links to online videos and resources to support their return.

Medical Council Registration Retention

The Medical Council offers a 50% reduction of the annual retention fee for doctors on maternity leave. This applies for one period only. See [here](#)^{xix} for instructions on how to apply for a refund.

References

ⁱ The Pregnant Anaesthetist: Association of Anaesthetists

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://anaesthetists.org/LinkClick.aspx%3Ffileticket%3D-rpxm7ftjzE%253D%26portalid%3D0&ved=2ahUKEwi61eaXk6eIAxUvWEEAHb53NmEQFnoECBIQAQ&usg=AOvVaw14eRyn9Jfmnl1QNJVpInqG>

ⁱⁱ García-Álvarez, J.M.; Escribano-Sánchez, G.; Osuna, E.; Molina-Rodríguez, A.; Díaz-Agea, J.L.; García-Sánchez, A. Occupational Exposure to Inhalational Anesthetics and Teratogenic Effects: A Systematic Review.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/radiation-emergencies/hcp/clinical-guidance/pregnancy.html>

^{iv} <https://uktis.org/monographs/exposure-to-ionising-radiation-in-pregnancy/>

^v *Healthcare* **2023**, 11, 883.

^{vi} Sunita Saha, Rosamond Jacklin, Arifa Siddika, Gill Clayton, Sascha Dua, Simon Smith. Safety of radioactive sentinel node biopsy for breast cancer and the pregnant surgeon – A review. *International Journal of Surgery* **2016**;36 (A):298-304.

^{vii} NHS: Infections in Pregnancy that May Affect Your Baby <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/infections-that-may-affect-your-baby>

^{viii} S.I. No. 30/2019- Radiological Protection Act 1991 (Ionising Radiation Regulations Act 2019): <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/si/30/>

^{ix} <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/health-and-safety/pregnant-post-natal-and-breastfeeding-employees/>

^x

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Safety_and_Health_Management/Section_6_Pregnancy_at_Work.pdf

^{xi} Pregnant, post-natal and breastfeeding employees; HSE Staff; Health and Safety <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/health-and-safety/pregnant-post-natal-and-breastfeeding-employees/>

^{xii} Citizens Information: Maternity Benefit; <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social-welfare/families-and-children/maternity-benefit/>

^{xiii} [Apply for maternity benefit - MyWelfare.ie](#)

xiv MB1 Form

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/10311/db803e83c4364702b53b5acb663461bc.pdf#page=null>

xv My Welfare <https://services.mywelfare.ie/en/topics/parents-children-family/maternity-benefit/>

xvi MB2 Form

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/10309/8753cb545c3a4e4890dda6f3ff69e310.pdf#page=null>

xvii Leave Entitlements <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/leave/maternity-leave/>

xviii RISR Eportfolio for training <https://kaizenep.com/>

xix Medical Council retention refund <https://www.medicalcouncil.ie/existing-registrants-/manage-your-registration/maternity-leave-reduction-of-the-retention-fee.html>