

Prenatal Education

Key Messages for Ontario



Safety during Pregnancy

Key Messages

Exposure to certain chemicals and pollutants before and during your pregnancy may have an effect on you and your unborn baby.

You can take simple steps to reduce your exposure to harmful substances often found in and around the home.

Things you may want to reduce use of or use with more caution include:

- ▶ Plastic storage containers or toys that are not BPA-free or PVC-free.
- ▶ Oil-based paints and thinners.
- ▶ Lead from pipes and renovation projects.
- ▶ Cleaning products with ammonia, bleach, and turpentine.
- ▶ Pesticides.

Alternatives could include:

- ▶ Glass food-storage containers or plastic products labelled as BPA-free.
- ▶ Toys labelled as phthalate-free or PVC-free.
- ▶ Latex paint and low-VOC paint or VOC-free paint.
- ▶ Baking soda or vinegar mixed with water as a cleaning agent.

Other helpful tips to minimize the risks of harmful substances in and around your home include:

- ▶ Airing out new plastic items before their use.
- ▶ Dusting or mopping your home frequently.
- ▶ Using lead-free products for hobbies such as painting, stained glass, and glazing pottery.
- ▶ Removing shoes at the door.
- ▶ Using a dry cleaner that does not use solvents.
- ▶ Ventilating your home when cleaning or painting.
- ▶ Reducing activity outdoors during Air Quality Index advisories.

Some personal care products may not be safe during pregnancy.

Contact Motherisk (see below) or speak to your health care provider if you have questions regarding personal care products or herbal products. Just because something is labelled as natural does not mean it is safe in pregnancy.

Some personal care products you may have questions about include:

- ▶ Tanning products.
- ▶ Nail polish and nail polish remover.
- ▶ Hairspray and hair dye.
- ▶ Skin products that contain retinol.
- ▶ Cosmetics that contain toxic ingredients.
- ▶ Insect repellents.
- ▶ Natural health products or herbal substances (pills, teas).

Use seatbelts and airbags properly when travelling by car during pregnancy.

It is important to use your seatbelt while pregnant. You may need to adjust your seatbelt as your body changes. Use a seatbelt with a lap and shoulder belt. Make sure there is no slack at your pelvis and shoulder. If the car has airbags keep at least 25 cm (9.75 inches) between you and the steering wheel or dashboard.

Make safe travel plans if you need to travel during your pregnancy.

Discuss any travel plans with your health care provider.

Things for you to think about when planning to travel during your pregnancy include:

- ▶ When and where it is safest to travel during your pregnancy.
- ▶ Method of travel. When travelling requires sitting for a long time, it is important to get up and walk around every one to two hours.
- ▶ Health facilities available to you at your destination.
- ▶ Vaccines you may need to protect yourself and your unborn baby.
- ▶ Extra insurance in case you need to see a health care provider.

Carry your prenatal records and your health care provider's contact information with you when travelling away from home in case of emergency.

Most women can continue to work safely throughout their pregnancy.

Things to consider about your workplace to ensure a comfortable and safe pregnancy include:

- ▶ If possible, adjust your workstation to suit your work and your changing body.
- ▶ Avoid heavy lifting, pushing, pulling or carrying.
- ▶ Take breaks if you have to sit or stand for long periods.
- ▶ If possible, reduce your stress levels.
- ▶ Avoid extended exposure to loud noise and very hot temperatures.
- ▶ Use safety precautions when working with X-rays.
- ▶ Use caution regarding exposures to infections. Make sure your vaccinations are up to date and practice good hygiene.
- ▶ Follow safety guidelines when working with chemicals and contaminants.

Discuss your work environment with your health care provider. Speak with your employer about any concerns that are raised. Discuss if modifications are needed to ensure your health and the health of your unborn baby. You may also check workplace safety guidelines and speak with your company's occupational health and safety office if they have one.

Caring for pets when you are pregnant may pose a health risk to you or your unborn baby.

The following is a list of precautions to take when caring for your pet.

- ▶ Avoid handling soiled cat litter to reduce the risk of infection with toxoplasmosis. If you cannot avoid it, wear gloves and wash your hands well afterwards. This is important.
- ▶ Get medical attention if you are bitten by an animal, including pets such as dogs, cats, or rodents.
- ▶ Avoid handling exotic animals if possible. If unable to avoid, find out how you can handle your exotic pet safely during your pregnancy.

Learn more about safety during pregnancy.

You can find out more about safety during pregnancy from the following resources.

- ▶ Your local public health unit 1-866-532-3161
- ▶ Motherisk Helpline 1-877-439-2744 or 416-813-7680 (Toronto and GTA)
www.motherisk.org
- ▶ Workers Health and Safety Centre 1-888-869-7950
www.whsc.on.ca
- ▶ oMama
www.omama.com