

# **Guidelines for Pregnant Veterinary Medical Students**

## **School of Veterinary Medicine, Louisiana State University**

The potential for injury during the education of veterinary students increases during pregnancy. Exposure to toxic drugs, infectious agents, inhalation anesthetics, radiation, and other agents or activities present real hazards to unborn children, particularly during the first trimester of pregnancy. In addition to chemical, infectious, and radiation dangers, physical accidents incurred while working with animals may also lead to serious injuries for mother and child.

Any student who is or may be pregnant should consider that fact in scheduling her surgery, anesthesia, oncology, equine medicine and surgery, food animal medicine and surgery, and radiology courses. It is in the best interests of pregnant students to maintain regular contact with their physician and to take appropriate steps to minimize exposure to hazards inherent in veterinary medical education. Please remember that the university cannot fundamentally alter its established curriculum or academic program. It may be necessary to make the decision to take a semester or even a year off to accommodate the birth of a child. While pregnancy is not generally considered a disability, pregnant students may wish to inform the associate dean for students as early as possible to facilitate communication and to take advantage of all available options. We are supportive of the needs of pregnant students or new mothers. A lactation room is available for those that have a need. Please do not hesitate to seek advice.

**Policy regarding exposure to radiation by pregnant students.** Under new amendments to state law, a woman may voluntarily declare her pregnancy while using or being exposed to ionizing radiation. This declaration is voluntary, must be in writing, and limits the exposure of the fetus to 0.5 rem. The standard form for this declaration may be obtained from Mary Haik, Radiation Safety Office, 123 Nuclear Science, 8-2747, maryhaik@lsu.edu. In addition, the student will need to contact the SVM radiation safety officer, Dr. Lorrie Gaschen, to receive a refresher course on radiation safety while pregnant. Decisions regarding exposure to radiation should be made in conjunction with your physician.

**Policy regarding exposure of waste anesthetic gases by pregnant and/or medically at-risk students.** If you are pregnant or have a medical condition resulting in impaired liver or renal function, it is our policy that: A. You may wear a respirator during periods of potential exposure to waste anesthetic gases (wearing a respirator is a decision made by you and your physician) B. You should minimize your potential exposure to waste anesthetic gases by: a) Practicing good anesthetic techniques b) Avoiding exposure to vapors generated during the filling of vaporizers c) Not going into the equine recovery stall while a horse is recovering from anesthesia d) Minimizing time in the small animal recovery area C. you should avoid exposure to nitrous oxide vapors at all times Decisions regarding exposure to waste anesthetic gases should be made in conjunction with your physician.

### **Rights and Responsibilities**

- It is recognized that pregnant students maintain their established student rights.

- Pregnant students are expected to complete each requirement of the veterinary curriculum. If the risks of completing certain components or specific assignments in the DVM curriculum are deemed unacceptable, pregnant students will develop, in consultation with and after approval by faculty, an alternate equivalent plan or schedule deemed acceptable by the University, the student, and their attending physician. Copies of all documents pertaining to revised assignments of pregnant students will be kept on file in the office of the Associate Dean for Veterinary Education and Student Affairs

## **Curriculum Concerns for Pregnant Students**

- Laboratories
  - Formalin exposure in anatomy laboratories.
  - Anesthetic gas exposure in surgery laboratories.
- Clinical Rotations: long work hours, exposure to sometimes unruly small and large animals, exposure to toxic drugs, and exposure to infectious diseases.
  - Diagnostic Imaging Rotation
    - Exposure to x-rays
  - Pathology Rotation
    - Physical labor of lifting heavy animals, slippery floors, zoonotic diseases (e.g., toxoplasmosis, cryptosporidiosis, brucellosis, salmonella, Bartonella etc.), exposure to formalin, exposure to DMSO
  - Food Animal Medicine and Surgery and Equine Medicine and Surgery Rotations
    - Exposure to prostaglandins, parasiticides (i.e., organophosphates, etc.), infectious organisms (*Cryptosporidia*, *Brucella*, *Salmonella*, *Chlamydia*, etc.), environmental conditions of hot, humid, and sometimes dusty conditions with much standing and walking required, exposure to large and sometimes unruly animals.
    - Being pushed, pulled, kicked or otherwise put in physically harmful situations
  - Anesthesiology and Surgery Rotations
    - Exposure to anesthetic gases.

## **Available Options**

1. Students may opt to continue regular student enrollment with selected schedule and assignment changes. While this is typically the chosen option it is important to note that this option has risks, and it may delay completion of the DVM program. It is dependent upon multiple factors:
  - The student's ability to participate in the revised educational program;
  - The ability of the school to make changes in the student's schedule of clinical assignments in advance; and
  - Availability of scheduled rotation assignments that might need to be changed.
2. Students in good academic standing may submit a written request to withdraw from the DVM program, for a period of time up to one academic year, to the Associate Dean for Veterinary Education and Student Affairs. Students who are allowed to withdraw are guaranteed to be readmitted upon request for up to one year and will be permitted to

graduate with a subsequent class upon successful completion of the program. This option minimizes health hazards and risks associated with attempting to continue a veterinary medical education while maintaining a pregnancy. This option also allows time to be with the new baby and make arrangements for childcare.