

Quality Area 4: Staffing Arrangements

Pregnancy in Early Childhood



Introduction

Kootingal and District Preschool are committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all employees including pregnant workers. This policy applies to staff and management.

Pregnancy is a time of great physical and emotional change that can lead to changes in the woman's ability to perform and manage certain types of work. Our service is committed to ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of pregnant staff members by providing information, strategies, and ongoing support, as well as information about leave entitlements available to them. Our service takes a 'best practice' approach to parental leave and supports all employees eligible for parental leave for the birth or adoption of a child.

Goals – What are we going to do?

Kootingal and District Preschool understand that pregnancy can bring many changes to women's ability to manage certain types of work, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy. We aim to work with all employees to negotiate a supportive working environment that will assist them to be healthy and productive members of the workforce.

Our service is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all employees including pregnant workers. We understand that pregnancy can bring many changes to women's ability to manage certain types of work, particularly at the later stages of pregnancy. We aim to work with all employees to negotiate a supportive working environment that will assist them to be healthy and productive members.

Strategies – To achieve our goals

The process and steps required to ensure a female employee's health and wellbeing during pregnancy will vary. For many female employees, variations to duties, equipment and the work environment will not be necessary and usual duties may be performed for the duration of the employee's pregnancy.

It is the responsibility of the female employee to raise and discuss any workplace concerns and/or issues with their Director. However, there may be instances where the Director is required to exercise their duty of care to ensure the safety, protection, and wellbeing of their staff.

Health and Safety

To reduce risk of injury or ill health with staff members who are pregnant, risk of injury or ill health will be discussed with all employees in accordance with the services Workplace Health and Safety policy and procedures. Where there is an identifiable risk associated with a pregnant employee's work, the Director will consult with the employee to examine how the work can be modified to eliminate or minimise the risk.

- The employer will maintain current information about their safety and health responsibilities and communicate this to their employees and where practicable, maintain a safe workplace for all employees.
- In regard to infectious diseases, the employer will alert all employees to the potential risks to health that may arise through their employment at the Service. Female carers will be advised they should have their immunity to Rubella, Measles, Chicken Pox tested well before planning pregnancy. A person can be immunised against Rubella before pregnancy however care should be taken not to fall pregnant within 3 months of immunisation.

- The approved provider/nominated supervisor will ensure all employees are aware of the risks of Cytomegalovirus (CMV) exposure during pregnancy and encourage female employees of childbearing age to discuss CMV testing with their doctor (cmv.org.au)
- The approved provider/nominated supervisor will ensure all female employees of childbearing age are aware of health risks including:
 - exposure to specific infectious viruses/diseases or conditions that can have an adverse impact on pregnancy and the unborn child including Cytomegalovirus (CMV), Hand, foot & mouth disease, Human parvovirus B19 (erythema infectiosum, fifth disease), Listeriosis, Rubella (German measles), Measles, Hepatitis B, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, Pertussis (Whooping cough), Toxoplasmosis and Varicella (chickenpox)
 - stress and burnout
 - swollen feet and varicose veins
 - heat stress
 - cigarette smoke (outside smoke free zones)
 - chemicals and chemical fumes
- The approved provider/nominated supervisor will implement strategies which help reduce physical stress for pregnant employees such as: - do fewer physical tasks such as sweeping, raking
- Pregnant women should avoid contact with cat faeces, to minimise the risk of toxoplasmosis.

Manual Handling

To minimise the risk of back pain and back injury to pregnant employees and to comply with Health and Safety and other relevant legislation, we will:

- ensure pregnant employees are aware they are at more risk of back pain and injury from working while pregnant because of anatomical and physiological changes such as softening of ligaments and tendons, extra weight load, muscle fatigue, and tiredness
- advise pregnant staff to consult their doctor if they have any back pain or other health concerns during the pregnancy
- ensure that pregnant staff are aware of the following strategies to reduce the risk of back pain and/or injury
 - avoid bending over: use your knees and hips to lower yourself to the children's level or when picking something up from a low level
 - try to maintain a correct posture as the growing uterus can frequently cause postural problems
 - try not to stand in any one position for too long
 - use footrests for raising feet when sitting
 - ensure you use correct lifting and carrying techniques
 - ensure that furniture such as nappy change tables are at the correct height to avoid unnecessary bending
 - use stepladders and trolleys if required
 - use adult-sized furniture, for example, adult-sized chairs rather than children's chairs
 - ensure that heavy or awkward items are stored at an appropriate height and close to where they are needed
 - restrict lifting children or heavy equipment.

Stress Management

To minimise the risk of stress and ensure pregnant employees have adequate opportunities for leave and

holidays, we will ensure employees are:

- aware they are at more risk of stress at work because of changing abilities to meet usual work commitments
- aware that the risk of stress at work might increase with the progression of the pregnancy
- aware that they are legally required to take leave from work for a period before and after the pregnancy and should seek support from the approved provider/ nominated supervisor to arrange leave
- provided with assistance for leave planning and provide current information to them about their conditions of employment and leave entitlements
- encouraged to see their general practitioner/ obstetrician if they have any stress or other psychological or physiological health problems during pregnancy.

Infectious Diseases and Immunisation

Due to constant close contact with children, staff at early childhood education and care services may be at an increased risk of contracting viruses and some vaccine-preventable diseases. Authorities advise against pregnant women receiving live viral vaccines during pregnancy, or within 28 days prior to falling pregnant. Therefore, women of childbearing age should ensure that vaccinations are up to date. Common vaccine-preventable infections that may have an adverse effect on pregnancy include:

- Rubella (German Measles)
- Measles
- Varicella (Chicken Pox)
- Hepatitis B
- Influenza
- Pertussis (Whooping Cough)
- Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
- Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease
- Human Parvovirus B19 (Erythema Infectiosum, Fifth Disease)
- Listeriosis
- Toxoplasmosis
- HIV AIDS

Employee Responsibilities

- It is necessary that employees inform the Director of their pregnancy as early as possible so that any potentially adverse risks can be averted, and alternative arrangements made if necessary.
- Pregnant employees have an obligation to inform the employer in writing of the expected date of birth (10 weeks' notice required), and the intention to take maternity leave (4 weeks' notice required), including the dates on which the employee wishes to start and finish the leave.
- A doctor's certificate confirming the pregnancy and expected date of birth is required to prove entitlement to take maternity leave.
- A pregnant employee can elect to continue working into the 6 weeks immediately before their expected date of birth.
 - If an employee does choose to keep working in that period, the employer can ask for a medical certificate to confirm:
 - They are fit for work

- Whether it is inadvisable for them to continue in their current role because of pregnancy-related illness or workplace risks
- Our service requires pregnant employees to raise any difficulties that they are experiencing in regard to performing their duties at the service with the Director, so that potential risks to health can be avoided and quality childcare maintained.
- Employees have a responsibility under Workplace Health & Safety legislation to take reasonable care to protect themselves (and others) in the workplace. This includes cooperating with the employer on health and safety matters, such as taking appropriate precautions to avoid health risks during pregnancy.

Pregnant employees, including casuals are entitled to move to a safe job if it isn't safe for them to do their normal job due to pregnancy. The employee must provide evidence that:

- she is able to work but cannot do her normal job (including why their normal job is not safe).
- how long she should not work in her normal job.

Evidence can be a medical certificate from a medical practitioner.

Employee Entitlements

Under the Fair Work Act 2009 and Anti-discrimination laws, pregnant employees, and their partner, are entitled to certain leave entitlements. The Service will at all times act to ensure that entitlements are made available to pregnant employees and employees who adopt a child, in accordance with these laws.

While employees are not required to notify their employer that they are pregnant, in some high-risk occupations such as early childhood education and care, it may be advisable to notify the employer as soon as possible. Employees will also need to notify their employer in order to access certain entitlements (Source: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015).

Industrial Issues

- The Director will maintain current information about their industrial responsibilities to their employees including The Fair Work Act and Children's Service Award 2010.
- Our service is registered with Centrelink for the Paid Parental Leave Scheme.
- The Director will ensure that all employees are made aware of their legal right to maternity leave at the time the employee advises of their pregnancy.

Paid Parental Leave Scheme

For children born or adopted after July 1, 2023, a payment for up to 100 days, or 20 weeks is available to assist parents care for a child. Parental Leave Pay and Dad and Partner Pay combined into one payment. For children born or adopted after July 1, 2024, Parental Leave Pay will increase, up to 26 weeks by 2026.

Unpaid Parental Leave and Related Entitlements

Under the National Employment Standards in the Fair Work Act 2009, an employee employed with the same employer for 12 months or more before they or their partner gives birth or adopts a child, may be entitled to up to 12 months of unpaid parental leave. An employee can also request an additional 12 months' unpaid leave. (Including long-term casuals) Parents who experience a stillbirth or the death of an infant during the first 24 months of life, can also take unpaid parental leave.

A pregnant employee who is eligible for unpaid parental leave can take unpaid special maternity leave if:

- she has a pregnancy-related illness or
- her pregnancy ends after 12 weeks because of a miscarriage, termination or stillbirth.

If an employee takes special maternity leave because of a pregnancy-related illness, the leave will end when the pregnancy or illness ends, whichever is earlier. If she takes leave because of a miscarriage, termination or stillbirth, leave can continue until she is fit for work.

Special maternity leave does not reduce the amount of unpaid parental leave that an employee can take.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Authority/Responsibility For
Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that the health and safety needs of pregnant employees are considered and act in a flexible manner as far as is reasonably practicable ➤ Ensure that all employees are familiar with recommended vaccinations for early childhood employees in accordance with The Australian immunisation handbook. ➤ Recommend to all staff that they consult their general practitioner to seek advice on immunisation prior to planning a pregnancy ➤ Encourage all staff to undergo blood tests to ascertain immunity status to common childhood infections, and take the appropriate action dependent upon results ➤ Alert all staff and families if a child or staff member contracts an infectious disease ➤ Recommend that pregnant staff members discuss concerns about the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) with their obstetrician or general practitioner and discuss available COVID-vaccinations ➤ Ensure that all staff members are practising effective hand hygiene at all times ➤ Ensure that all staff members are familiar with infection control policies and procedures and actively adhere to these at all times ➤ Complete a risk assessment to identify any hazards or potential risks to pregnant staff members in the Service ➤ Put systems and strategies into place to address increased risk due to having a pregnant staff member in the workplace ➤ Consult with the pregnant employee to examine how their work tasks can be modified to eliminate or minimise risks ➤ Negotiate with the pregnant employee to ensure a safe environment ➤ Provide information to the employee’s general practitioner, as requested, in regard to normal duties performed on a day-to-day basis ➤ Meet anti-discrimination law obligations by ensuring pregnant employees are not subjected to negative comments or remarks about their pregnancy.
Pregnant Employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Disclose their pregnancy in a timely manner to ensure that the employer can support her health, safety and well-being in the workplace (Note: there is no requirement under the Fair Work Act (2009) for an employee to disclose their pregnancy) ➤ Maintain immunisation records

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consult with their general practitioner if planning a pregnancy to establish their immunity status for common childhood infections, and information about recommended vaccinations ➤ Ensure the treating medical practitioner is aware of the specific work environment and activities that are undertaken on a day-to-day basis ➤ Provide up-to-date immunisation statement to management for recording in their individual staff record ➤ Adhere to Workplace Health and Safety legislation and take reasonable care to protect themselves (and others) in the workplace. This includes cooperating with the approved provider/ nominated supervisor on health and safety matters, such as taking appropriate precautions to avoid health risks during pregnancy ➤ Be familiar with and adhere to policies and procedures pertaining to infection control and effective hand hygiene ➤ Consult with their obstetrician and/or medical practitioner should there be an outbreak of an infectious disease or virus in the Service that they are not immune to, in regard to whether they should continue to attend work ➤ Immediately advise the approved provider and/or nominated supervisor if they believe there is a hazard or potential risk to the pregnancy in the workplace ➤ Notify the approved provider and/or nominated supervisor of the pregnancy if health and safety issues that may affect the pregnancy are experienced or may be foreseen ➤ Provide the required notice of intended leave in writing to the approved provider and/or nominated supervisor ➤ Provide medical evidence from general practitioner and/or specialists as required to the approved provider and/or nominated supervisor in a timely manner ➤ Provide a doctor's certificate confirming they are fit and able to continue work if the employee wishes to continue working past 6 weeks prior to the expected date of birth [Fair Work Ombudsman] ➤ Discuss paid and/or unpaid parental leave entitlements and options with management/approved provider ➤ Inform their employer if they intend to take up unpaid parental leave within 24 months of a child's birth or adoption and how this leave will be taken: single continuous leave or flexible period up to 30 days
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Returning to work after Maternity Leave

Employees who are entitled to paid or unpaid Parental Leave under the Fair Work Act have the right to return to their pre-parental position at the end of the leave- 'Return to work guarantee' or in the case of an employee who was transferred to alternative duties, to the position held immediately prior to this transfer. Where such a position no longer exists, but other positions are available for which the employee is qualified and capable of performing, they will be entitled to a position as nearly comparable in status and salary to their former position.

- Employees may return to work before the end of their Paid Parental Leave period if the employer agrees (Paid Parental Leave payments will stop when they return. There are some exceptions to this. See: Services Australia for further information)

- Employees will maintain contact with the Approved Provider and/or Nominated Supervisor and negotiate a return date no less than 4 weeks prior to the expiration of the leave period. Employees returning to work after the birth of their child will not be discriminated against in regard to accessing childcare within the service or breast feeding/expressing milk.

The approved provider/nominated supervisor will support the returning employee to settle back into the work environment with consideration for their physical and emotional wellbeing. Where practicable the approved provider/ nominated supervisor will support the employee's return to work and continuity of care for the children by offering flexible work hours.

Should issues arise in relation to caring for a staff member's child at the service, the options for modifying care arrangement will be discussed with the employee, with the aim of reaching a mutually agreeable resolution.

Manual Handling

To minimise the risk of back injury in pregnant staff and to comply with Workplace Health and Safety and other relevant legislation, Kootingal & District Preschool will:

- Ensure pregnant childcare staff are aware they are at more risk of back pain and injury from working while pregnant because of anatomical and physiological changes such as softening of ligaments and tendons, extra weight load, muscle fatigue and tiredness.
- Ensure pregnant childcare staff are aware that the risk of back pain and injury increases with the progression of pregnancy and their ability to do physical work decreases and should see their doctor if they have any back pain or other health problem during pregnancy.
- Restrict lifting
- Diverge tasks to avoid prolonged standing
- Limit standing time
- Use footrests for raising feet when sitting
- Use lower height workbenches, desks, and chairs.

Stress Management

To minimise the risk of stress and ensure pregnant childcare staff have adequate opportunities for leave and holidays, Kootingal & District Preschool will:

- Ensure pregnant childcare staff are aware they are at more risk of stress at work because of changing abilities to meet usual work commitments.
- Ensure pregnant childcare staff are aware that the risk of stress at work might increase with the progression of the pregnancy.
- Ensure pregnant childcare staff are aware they will have a need to take leave from work for a period before and after the pregnancy, during the initial period of caring for a new child and should seek support from the Service Manager in arranging leave.
- Assist pregnant childcare staff with leave planning and provide information for them about their conditions of employment and leave entitlements.
- Advise pregnant childcare staff to see their doctor if they have any stress or other psychological or physiological health problems during pregnancy

Immunisation & Infectious Diseases

To minimise the risk of exposure to infectious diseases transmitted from children in their care and prevent illness and other risks from vaccine preventable diseases by appropriate immunisation, Kootingal & District Preschool will:

- Provide information to all staff in the Service on current recommended immunisations for childcare staff in accordance with current Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule and the current edition of the Australian Immunisation Handbook
- Recommend to female staff that they seek advice from their local doctor about immunisation needs before planning pregnancy.
- Advise all staff before commencing work that the above recommendations for immunisation will minimise transmission and risks of those infectious diseases in children and staff and if a staff member has concerns about these diseases or immunisations, they should seek advice from their doctor before commencing work.
- Advise all staff that if an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease occurs in the service, staff should inform the Director if they are not immunised against that disease.
- Unimmunised staff should consult their doctor to determine if it is appropriate for them not to attend work during the outbreak and discuss any issues relating to their immunisation or other medical management.
- If a pregnant staff member is unsure whether they have had any of the recommended immunisations, advise them to discuss their immunisation needs with their doctor.
- If any immunisation is contraindicated because of the stage of their pregnancy, advise them to discuss with their doctor the precautions to take, both in relation to work, and in general.
- If female staff are unsure of their rubella immune status and are of childbearing age, recommend the Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccination to prevent risks in pregnancy from rubella infection. MMR vaccination needs to be given at least one month prior to pregnancy and should not be given during pregnancy.
- Ensure all childcare staff are aware that specific diseases for which there is evidence for increased risk of exposure in childcare and can have an adverse effect on pregnancy are: Rubella (German measles), Cytomegalovirus (CMV), Fifth Disease (erythema infectiosum or parvovirus), Varicella (chicken pox).
- Ensure all staff are aware that cytomegalovirus (CMV) can be transmitted in saliva, droplets from sneezing and coughing, and urine, and all childcare staff should:
 - Wear gloves when changing nappies when soiled by faeces or urine, having any contact with faeces, urine, blood, vomit, or any other body fluid and when wiping noses.
 - Wash hands after changing nappies or any contact with faeces, urine, blood, or other body fluids, after wiping noses and after handling or patting animals and pets.
 - If pregnant, take precaution not to have contact with urine and not to kiss infants or children on the mouth, because of the risk of exposure to CMV.
 - If pregnant and preferably before becoming pregnant, have a blood test for CMV indicators and discuss this further with doctor.
 - Cover open skin, cuts, abrasions, wounds, or dermatitis on their hands with a water-resistant occlusive dressing, which should be changed each time it is soiled or wet.

Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

Management and staff will monitor and review the effectiveness of the Pregnancy in Early Childhood Policy regularly. Updated information will be incorporated as needed.

This policy will be monitored to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and unless deemed necessary through the identification of practice gaps, the service will review this policy every 12 months.

Families and staff are essential stakeholders in the policy review process and will be given opportunity and encouragement to be actively involved.

In accordance with Regulation 172 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations, the service will ensure that families of children enrolled at the service are notified at least 14 days before making any change to a policy or procedure that may have significant impact on the provision of education and care to any child enrolled at the service; a family's ability to utilise the service; the fees charged or the way in which fees are collected.

Links to other policies:

Workplace Health and Safety

Cleaning and Maintaining the Environment

Dealing with Infectious Diseases

Enrolment and Orientation

Medication Administration

Toileting and Nappy Change

Related Legislation:

NQS

Quality Area 2	Children's health and safety	
Quality Area 4	Staffing arrangements	
Element	4.1.2	Continuity of staff
Quality Area 7	Governance and leadership	
Element	7.1.2	Management system

National Law

Section	168	Offence related to required programs
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National Regulations

Reg	88	Infectious Disease Policy
Reg	168	Education and care services must have policies and procedures
Reg	170	Policies and procedures are to be followed

Sources:

- NSW Department of Community Services
- ECA Code of Ethics.
- NSW Department of Community Services
- Work Cover Authority NSW
- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).
- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2023). Guide to the National Quality Framework.
- Australian Government Department of Health Australian Immunisation Handbook
- Australian Human Rights Commission - <https://www.humanrights.gov.au>
- Australian Pregnancy Care Guidelines. V2.1 (2024).
- CMV Australia. (2024) - www.cmv.org.au
- Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics. (2016).

- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023).
- Education and Care Services National Regulations. (Amended 2023).
- Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth).
- Fair Work Commission - <https://www.fwc.gov.au>
- Fair Work Ombudsman Maternity Leave and Parental Leave - <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/maternity-and-parental-leave>
- Fair Work Ombudsman Parental leave & related entitlements (2022) - <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/fact-sheets/minimum-workplace-entitlements/parental-leave-and-related-entitlements>
- National Health and Medical Research Council. (2013). Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services (5th Ed.). Australia: Commonwealth of Australia. NSW Government. (n.d.).
- NSW Health. (2016). Handle with care: Looking after yourself in pregnancy.
- Pregnancy Birth and Baby. Cytomegalovirus (CMV) during pregnancy.
- Safe Work Australia
- The Pregnancy Centre (2016) - <http://www.thepregnancycentre.com.au/pregnancy/well-being/taking-care-of-your-back>

Developed: 2016

Reviewed: Nov 16, Aug 18, May 22, May 23, Jun 24

Reviewed & Update: Oct 25