



Nicky Ackerley BA(Hons)

Nicky is the owner of HR Support Consultancy. She has a BA(Hons) in Business Studies, is a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and has been a practising HR manager for more than 20 years. HR Support Consultancy has provided the BVNA Members Advisory Service (formerly known as the Industrial Relations Service) since it began in 2002.

Omission

BVNA would like to highlight to its members that unfortunately the previous published email address for our helpline was incorrect and if any emails have recently been sent to the helpline team that these are resent directly to nickyackerley@hrsupportconsultancy.co.uk.

I am a working Veterinary Nurse and I have just found out I'm pregnant – what do I need to know?

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Particularly if this is your first pregnancy, you will be discovering a whole new world, not least in your workplace.

You might not want everyone to know in the early weeks that you are pregnant and this is your right. You might want to confide in your manager however if you are affected by early pregnancy symptoms so they are aware, but your employer will not be able to take any specific action for your health and safety unless you do tell him/her about your pregnancy. Your employer might ask for proof and you will need to get this from your doctor or midwife. You should however tell your employer you are pregnant in writing at least 15 weeks before the beginning of the week the baby is due (you need to do this to ensure your right to maternity pay and maternity leave later on).

It is a sad fact that not all pregnancies continue, and if your pregnancy were to end early for whatever reason you will probably need some time off work. You have every right to confidentiality in all matters concerning your medical details, hopefully your employer will be supportive and understanding. It is unlawful for your employer to include anytime off sick for pregnancy related reasons when considering your sickness record for action for a poor attendance record, and any time off sick because a pregnancy has ended should be treated in the same way.

You should be allowed time off work for all ante natal appointments and also ante natal classes as these are usually considered to be part of ante natal care.

Your employer should have risk assessments in place for all staff, but sometimes

it is advisable to undertake one specifically for pregnant employees, you should be involved in this process and it should be reviewed regularly as your bump gets bigger!

Some of the risks to be managed are:

Lifting and strenuous movements, long shifts, night working, use of chemical and biological agents, stress, passive smoking, extremes of heat and cold, x rays, travelling, noise, compressed air, avoiding cat faeces, working alone.

You are protected at work from discrimination on grounds of pregnancy and maternity, but your welfare is best managed by a joint approach between you and your employer. If you have specific needs then talk to your employer about them, your employer may not be able to make all the adjustments you might ask for (which may be supported by your doctor or midwife) and if this is the case your employer should suspend you on full pay.

Check your employment contract to find out about your employer's policies regarding maternity, some employers may have contractual maternity pay which can be more than the statutory rate. Your entitlement to statutory leave and pay will depend on whether you meet the conditions in terms of length of time employed and pay received. We can help you find out what your entitlement is.

For further support with this or any other HR issue, BVNA members can call the BVNA Advisory Service Helpline on 01822 870270 or email nickyackerley@supportconsultancy.co.uk.