fact sheet

march of dimes
Vermont

Prevent Pregnancy Discrimination in the Workplace

More Women are Working While Pregnant and After They Become Mothers

Encouraging healthy pregnancies is critical to reducing premature births, birth defects and infant mortality.[4] It's also good business: employers spend more than $12 billion annually on claims related to prematurity and complicated births in the United States.[5]

Over the past 30 years, the participation rate in the labor force of women with children under age 3 has risen from 34.3% in 1975 to 60.9% in 2011.[1] Half of all mothers work during pregnancy and return to work after their baby is born. According to the United States Census Bureau, out of all first-time mothers who worked while pregnant between 2006 and 2008, 88% worked into their last trimester, while 65% worked into their last month of pregnancy.[3] Among women who worked during their pregnancy between 2005 and 2007, 58.6% returned to work 3 months after giving birth and 72.9% returned to work 6 months after giving birth.

In view of these trends, employers have an important role to play in assisting their pregnant employees in having healthy pregnancies and healthy babies. To protect the health of their pregnancies, some women may need to take certain precautions in the workplace. For instance, women should wear gloves or a mask if using chemicals, should not lift heavy objects, and should rest periodically if they stand for long periods of time. When women return to work after pregnancy, employers should create a supportive environment for them to continue breastfeeding.

Pregnancy Discrimination Could Be Avoided With Reasonable Accommodations

H.S. 808 would ensure reasonable accommodations are provided for pregnant workers who are limited in their ability to perform their jobs due to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. The law is designed to ensure that these accommodations would not impose an undue hardship on the employer. Examples might include providing an employee with extra bathroom breaks, assistance with heavy lifting, or a light duty assignment. Such accommodations would afford pregnant women and new mothers the ability to continue working, protecting both their physical health and their financial stability.

Key Points

- Rising numbers of women are remaining in the workforce during pregnancy and working later into their pregnancies than ever before.
- Half of all women work during pregnancy and go back to work after their baby is born.
- Some women may need to take precautions on the job in order to protect the health of their pregnancy.
- Reasonable accommodations for pregnancy, childbirth or a pregnancy-related condition enable pregnant women and new mothers to stay at work, maintaining both their physical health and their financial stability.

1. United States. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Feb. 2013. Web. 25 May 2014. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook-2012.pdf>.
2. Wang, Wendy, Kim Parker, and Paul Taylor. *Breadwinner Moms*. Rep. PewResearch Social & Demographic Trends, 29 May 2013. Web. 25 May 2014. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/29/breadwinner-moms/>.
3. Laughlin, Lynda, 2011. *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 2006-2008*. Current Population Report, P70-128. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.
4. Institute of Medicine. 2007. Preterm Birth: Causes, Consequences, and Prevention. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. Published and unpublished analyses.
5. Employer expenditures and healthcare utilization figures from Truven health Analytics, Inc. Costs of Preterm Birth. Prepared for March of Dimes, 2013.

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The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose volunteers and staff work to improve the health of infants and children by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education and advocacy. For the latest resources and information, visit **marchofdimes.org** or **nacersano.org**.