

PREGNANCY AT SEA POLICY

The University of Delaware College of Earth, Ocean, & Environment (“UD”) is committed to assuring the health and safety of all passengers and reasonably accommodating all persons who wish to work and/or travel aboard research vessels operated by UD. This Pregnancy at Sea Policy (the “Policy”) is applicable to all personnel aboard any vessel owned or operated by UD.

In order to comply with industry standards, pregnant women are welcome aboard vessels, provided that:

1. they are within the first 23 weeks of their pregnancy and will not enter their 24th week at any time during the cruise; and
2. they are medically fit for marine travel and have provided documentation from their physician prior to boarding.

Associated Risks

Our policy attempts to fairly balance the risks to all involved. A significant risk to the individual is that UD vessels do not sail with a physician or other medical personnel onboard, and do not have specialized medical equipment to care for pregnancy-related issues should they occur. UD vessels may also work far from the nearest port and therefore, if a medical emergency develops, the vessel may require many hours or even days of transit before a patient may be disembarked for medical care. A lesser risk is that some medications for seasickness may not be suitable for pregnant women.

Maritime medical practitioners note that “*complications at any time during pregnancy, in particular miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies, are always more dramatic at sea and therefore dreaded by the medical staff, especially on cruises to remote areas where shore-side medical facilities and blood transfusions are not available.*” (Dahl, 1999).

There are also risks to the activities and operations of the vessel. These include the potential for losing operational days if a medical evacuation is required. Typically, those days are not replaceable due to funding and scheduling constraints.

It is important that each pregnant woman who may be a passenger on a UD vessel verify compliance with their home institution’s policies and procedures, as they may differ from this Policy. For example, U.S. government agencies have policies that are somewhat more conservative, with many asserting that no pregnant member shall remain aboard a ship beyond her 20th week of pregnancy.

References

Dahl, E., Pregnancy at sea: 24th week of gestation is the limit, *International Maritime Health*, 2007, 58, 1-4

Dahl, E., *Surgical Emergencies at Sea*. In: Cruise medicine (ed. Harrison T), Maritime Health Systems, Ltd, Annapolis, 1999.