

RISK MANAGEMENT

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PREGNANCY AT SEA POLICY

Purpose: Pregnancy and sailing aboard the Research Vessel *Endeavor*.

Applicability: All passengers and crew aboard the Endeavor research vessel.

Overview

The University of Rhode Island (URI) Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO) is committed to reasonably accommodating all persons who wish to work and/or travel aboard research vessels operated by the University of Rhode Island. In complying with industry standards, pregnant women are welcome aboard vessels under the following conditions:

1. they are within the first 24 weeks of their pregnancy, and
2. they are medically fit for marine travel (requires a note from a physician prior to boarding).

Risks

There are significant risks to individual's traveling while pregnancy which include:

- Lack of physicians, medical staff and specialized medical equipment to care for pregnancy-related issues should they occur.
- Lack of immediate access to medical facilities or services since research vessels often work far from the nearest port, sometimes in remote areas of the globe. If a medical emergency develops, the ship may require extensive travel time before a patient may be disembarked for medical care.
- Seasickness may cause complications in pregnancies as some medications are not suitable to take while pregnant.

There are also risks to the research operation such as the potential for losing operational days if a medical evacuation is required, and those days are usually not replaceable due to funding and scheduling constraints.

Medical Reviews & Industry Standards

Maritime medical practitioners advise 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).

A medical review conducted by a panel of physicians assembled by the Cruise Lines International Association concluded that passengers and crew should be prohibited from sailing once they will have entered the 24th week of pregnancy at any time during the cruise. This is now the standard for most of the cruise line industry.

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.