

NZ Rugby Pregnancy Policy

Introduction

New Zealand Rugby (NZR) is committed to providing a safe and inclusive rugby environment for all female players to participate in Rugby. This commitment extends to those players who are pregnant.

Whilst NZR supports low to moderate impact exercise during pregnancy, it equally recognises the unique nature of rugby as a collision sport with significant body impacts and forces involved.

The resulting increase in risk of injury to the player and the unborn child necessitates NZR establishing a policy concerning participation in rugby during pregnancy and in the early post-pregnancy period.

Scope

This policy applies to all:

- players contracted to New Zealand Rugby, and
- players playing in New Zealand Rugby administered domestic competitions

from the time they become aware that they are pregnant.

For all Players contracted to NZ Rugby, this policy should be read in conjunction with the relevant MOUs, as well as the Parental Policy that applies to both of those National Teams.

Increased Risk of Injury During Pregnancy

The *World Rugby Pregnancy and Rugby Guideline*¹ is clear that it is not recommended for a player to participate in rugby while pregnant.

“Pregnancy has an impact on women that can increase the predisposition to injury during exercise. Hormonal changes are known to increase elasticity of muscles and ligaments which can affect lower back and pelvis structures. As the uterus enlarges, balance and coordination can also be affected due to a shift in the centre of gravity.

Studies related to women’s Rugby confirm that the abdomen is responsible for 1.6% of all injuries. There are no evidence-based studies quantifying the risk to a pregnant woman or unborn child whilst playing Rugby. There is evidence, however, that blunt abdominal trauma does pose a risk of placental abruption, preterm labour and uterine rupture.”

¹ <https://playerwelfare.worldrugby.org/?subsection=60>

New Zealand Rugby's Position

NZR's position is that a player is not able to participate in contact training for rugby or rugby matches at any level of play whilst pregnant. It makes this recommendation to reduce the risk of injury to the player and the unborn child.

Consistent with this recommendation and its duty of care to players, New Zealand Rugby has the following expectations of players and management² who may be involved in such a situation.

Notification by a player who is pregnant

A player, who is pregnant, is advised to make the team medical personnel (team doctor or physio) aware of the pregnancy as soon as it is known to them. The team doctor or physio will explain to the player the risks of undertaking contact training while pregnant. Support will also be offered to the player if there are any concerns around the player's physical or mental well-being, but it will not be a substitute for the player's own maternity care, which the player will need to arrange separately.

Whilst it is understood that a player might prefer to inform family and friends of their pregnancy first (publicly as it were), it is expected that the team doctor or physio will be informed as soon as possible, respecting the player's right to confidentiality. The team doctor or physio will remind the player of the requirement to inform team management no later than the end of the first trimester of the pregnancy.

This is to avoid management, albeit inadvertently, placing a player and their pregnancy in a position of increased risk without having had the opportunity to ensure that player is fully informed in all matters relating to that pregnancy.

This acknowledges the obligation of the player to reasonably contribute to NZR fulfilling its duty of care to that player.

Management's Responsibilities

Having been informed, members of the player's management group ('management') will work with the player to determine the most appropriate path for the player from that point in time as detailed below.

Management who have been told by a player that she is pregnant will respect the right to confidentiality the player has in disclosing her pregnancy.

² In this setting management is defined as staff of New Zealand Rugby, Teams in Black team management and Provincial Union team management across all domestic competition levels.

There are no expectations on a player to continue to play and train for rugby from this time onward. Team Management will however support the right of the player who wishes to continue to be involved in the team, however it must be ensured that the safety of the player and her unborn child are placed first in accordance with this policy.

Medical advice within the management should be sought at this time if they are not already aware. It is also expected that the player will have sought their own independent medical advice and care in relation to her pregnancy generally.

Summary of steps for individual case management

Each player will have different individual circumstances, and there are many factors to take into consideration, including the player's own pregnancy medical advice, in managing and supporting their playing and training commitments, and an eventual return to play.

There are several steps management and the player should take together throughout the player's pregnancy, including:

- (1) The player to notify team medical personnel (either team doctor or physio) of their pregnancy as soon as they are aware that they are pregnant. Medical personnel will advise the player of the risks of playing and training while pregnant and provide the player with the necessary support.
- (2) The player is required to notify team management as soon as possible but no later than the end of the first trimester.
- (3) Respecting a player's right to keep the news of their pregnancy confidential, the player and management will discuss options for the player to remain involved with the team in a non-contact and safe manner until the player wishes to advise the remainder of the team. Medical advice may be sought.
- (4) If the player wishes to take an extended break from the team while pregnant, this will be respected by the team, and a return to play post-partum (if desired) will be worked through in due course.
- (5) If the player wishes to continue to undertake appropriate non-contact training during her pregnancy, the team will provide access to support services to enable this to occur while ensuring the safety of the player and unborn child. The team medical personnel will assist with determining the appropriate level of involvement of the player.

- (6) Management and the player will discuss a potential return to play for the player after her pregnancy, with a focus on the physiological changes to the player's body and the necessity to always ensure safety of the player as the first priority. Medical support may be sought to assist with this.
- (7) Consequent to this, team management will work with the player and the wider team to assist with the integration of the player back into the team, through to the player's return to full play.

Noting the primary recommendation of this policy, a player may nevertheless seek to continue to be involved in contact training and playing rugby while pregnant. In doing so, this carries obligations that New Zealand Rugby, and its partners, to address duty of care issues towards the player.

Acknowledging this, a player who wishes to continue playing once they know they are pregnant has an obligation to obtain independent medical advice that this is permissible. This will be at the player's expense.

In order to permit this there must be independent (of both parties) medical advice advising that this acceptable and it must also be documented in the player's notes that they are aware of the increased risk to them and the unborn child of harm.