

Supporting Your Breastfeeding Employees

Breast milk is the ideal form of nutrition for infants, with health benefits for both mother and baby. In the United States today, over 50% of mothers with children less than one year of age are in the labor force. Clearly, any initiative to support breastfeeding must address the workplace.

The benefits of breastfeeding to both mother and baby are widely acknowledged. National health goals for 2010 call for 75% of mothers to breastfeed in the early postpartum period and for 50% of mothers to continue breastfeeding for at least 6 months. These goals will be reached only with the support of employers.

Why?

In order to maintain an adequate milk supply, a woman must either nurse her baby or express milk regularly. In addition to being critical to successful breastfeeding, workplace breastfeeding support programs also save employers money:

- By reducing turnover; skilled employees are more likely to return to work after the birth of a child.
- By reducing sick time/leave taken for illness and lowering health care costs, since breastfed babies are less likely to be ill.
- By improving productivity, loyalty, employee satisfaction and morale.

For a modest investment, your company will also:

- Enjoy a reputation as a company concerned for the health and welfare of its employees and their families.
- Add an important recruitment incentive for women.

How?

There are components of a corporate lactation program that are simple and very inexpensive to implement:

1. Create an environment that respects and supports breastfeeding. Develop a written policy that informs *all* employees of your support of breastfeeding. Outline the steps you have taken to respect employees' right to breastfeed while continuing to pursue the mission of your company or organization. Make the policy part of your company's written policies on maternity/paternity benefits and make it available to all employees.
2. Provide breaks for women to nurse or express breast milk, allowing her to adjust the beginning/ending time of work if necessary. Allowing flexible hours, part-time work or job sharing can benefit all employees, including nursing mothers.
3. Provide a private area that is quiet, clean and comfortable. There should be sink nearby for handwashing and cleaning the breastpump. A small refrigerator is ideal, but a place to keep a small ice chest or thermos is sufficient.

A *comprehensive* lactation program requires an additional investment of time and money, yet many employers have found it worthwhile to establish:

4. Breastfeeding education and support, both before and after the birth. An employee assistance program, a single interested employee, or a work group might design a program to include written educational materials, on-site classes or support groups, or the services of a lactation professional.
5. A “pump room” with hospital-grade breast pumps. (An effective pump can significantly decrease the time needed for pumping.)
6. On-site or near-site childcare.

For more information

Many states have instituted Mother-Friendly Business programs (sometimes to comply with state laws). Contact the ACNM State Policy Analyst to find out if there is a program in your state.

Examples include:

Texas: www.tdh.state.tx.us/lactate

Vermont:

www.healthyvermonters.info/cpy/bhkf/feeding.friendly.shtml.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (NY) maintains a web site that addresses federal breastfeeding legislation and other resources.

www.house.gov/maloney/issues/breastfeeding.

What gives These Companies a Competitive Edge? Worksite Support for

Breastfeeding Employees. Available from Health Mothers, Healthy Babies. www.hmhb.org

Breastfeeding Support at the Workplace: Best Practices to Promote Health and Productivity. Available from Washington Business Group on Health. www.wbgh.org

National Women’s Health Information Center www.4woman.gov/Breastfeeding

LaLeche League International www.la lecheleague.org

International Lactation Consultant Association www.ilca.org

Medela Inc www.medela.com

Working Mother magazine annually recognized 100 companies for their culture that is friendly to working mothers. www.workingmother.com



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