

# Supporting Breastfeeding in the Workplace

## The Problem

*Breastfeeding rates decrease as women return to work. A supportive work environment can help women continue breastfeeding.*

*Returning to work is associated with shorter breastfeeding duration. Women who return to work often face difficulties continuing breastfeeding. One barrier women face is the lack of breastfeeding supportive work environments.*



Example lactation room.

## What does it mean “to support breastfeeding in the workplace”?

According to *The Business Care for Breastfeeding*<sup>1</sup>, a comprehensive lactation support program includes:

### 1. Privacy during milk expression

- Designate a private space that can be secured (multiple rooms if needed).
- Consider providing breast pump equipment and a cooler or refrigerator for storing milk.
- Arrange for scheduling room usage and for routine cleaning.

### 2. Flexible breaks and work options

- Allow gradual transition back to full time work.
- Incorporate time to express milk at work.
- Allow for transition options such as part-time work, telecommuting, flexible schedules, or job sharing.
- Allow access to baby at work through on-site child care; allowing caregiver to bring baby to mom at work to nurse; or allow mom to bring baby to work (up to age 6 months).

### 3. Education resources

- Offer prenatal classes and postpartum lactation counseling.
- Provide back to work education with an IBCLC or other health professional.
- Incorporate ongoing education with a resource library containing breastfeeding materials.

### 4. Workplace support

- Encourage support from management, co-workers and other moms.
- Establish a lactation support policy for clarity and consistency.

## Women in the Workforce

In 2012, an estimated 57.7% of women participated in the workforce. The labor force participation rate is higher for women with children age 6-17 years (76%) compared to women with children less than six years (64.7%). Women with children less than three years of age comprise 60.7% of the labor force.<sup>2</sup>

## Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the optimal nutrition for infants. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months, followed by continued breastfeeding as complementary foods are introduced, with continuation of breastfeeding for one year or longer as mutually desired by mother and infant.<sup>3</sup>

### Women experience decreased risk of<sup>3</sup>:

- Obesity
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Breast and ovarian cancer
- Postpartum depression

### Infants experience decreased risk of<sup>3</sup>:

- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Infections (respiratory and GI)
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Childhood cancers

Breastfed infants also have better neurodevelopmental outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

## Benefits to YOUR Business

Both large and small business owners reap substantial benefits by supporting female employees who wish to continue breastfeeding their infants upon returning to work. The bottom line: supporting breastfeeding employees is good for business and saves money. Employers find that the benefits far outweigh the costs of providing lactation support program. In fact, businesses that provide lactation support services save \$3.00 for every \$1.00 spent on those services.<sup>4</sup>

## Breastfeeding & The Law

The Affordable Care Act requires employers to provide “reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for 1 year after the child’s birth each time such employee has need to express the milk.” Employers are also required to provide “a place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public”<sup>5</sup>

All employers covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) must comply with the law. Hourly employees covered by the FLSA have the right to break time and a private space to express milk while at work. Salaried employees, or those exempt from overtime pay, are not covered by the federal law, however, they may be covered by a state law.<sup>5</sup> Twenty-five states have laws related to breastfeeding in the workplace.<sup>6</sup> The individual section of the state or federal law that is the strongest is the requirement. Thus, one law or the other does not apply in totality and the requirement may be parts of both the state and federal law.<sup>7</sup>

The law includes small businesses; however, they may be exempt if the business has fewer than 50 employees **and** can demonstrate that compliance would impose an undue hardship.<sup>5</sup>

An objective of Healthy People 2020 is to “increase the proportion of employers that have worksite lactation support programs” to 38%. In 2009, 25% of employers reported providing an onsite lactation/mother’s room.<sup>8</sup>

### Company Benefits

- Decreased healthcare costs
- Decreased employee absenteeism
- Increase in employee retention
- Increase in employee morale and loyalty
- Positive public relations

## Reduced Health Care Costs



Breastfed babies and their moms are healthier; and therefore do not visit the doctor as much as formula fed infants.<sup>1,9</sup> This equates to lower medical insurance claims for businesses. The positive effects of breastfeeding on mothers potentially reduces future illness and medical claims. A breastfeeding mother recovers faster from childbirth and reports lower stress levels.<sup>10</sup> Since the positive health effects of breastfeeding are best documented in an infant's first year of life, an employer will see a quick return on his investment.<sup>4</sup>

One study found that for every 1000 infants not breastfed there were 2,033 extra doctor visits, 212 hospitalization days and 609 prescriptions, costing an additional \$331-475 per infant during the first year of life.<sup>11</sup>

- Cigna conducted a 2 year study of employees participating in their lactation support program. They found an annual savings of \$240,000 in health care expenditures, 62% fewer prescriptions and \$60,000 savings in reduced absenteeism rates.<sup>1</sup>
- Mutual of Omaha found that health care costs for newborns are three times lower for babies whose mothers participate in the companies maternity and lactation program, equaling a yearly savings of \$115,881 in healthcare claims for nursing mothers and their babies.<sup>1</sup>
- During focus group interviews, employers acknowledged that breastfed babies experienced fewer health related problems which contributed to fewer claims to insurance providers. These employers suggested that insurance providers pass these savings on in the form of lower premiums and felt that this savings alone is a bottom line incentive to support a lactation program in an organization.<sup>12</sup>

## Decreased Employee Absenteeism

Since breastfed babies are healthier, employers can see a decrease in absenteeism from employees having to stay home to care for sick children.

- Of the 40 illnesses causing a one day absence for employees, only 25% occurred in mothers of breastfed infants while 75% occurred in formula fed infants.<sup>1</sup>
- Cigna saved \$60,000 per year in lower absenteeism rates among women who breastfeed their infants.<sup>13</sup>
- Home Depot's lactation program contributes to a cost savings of \$42,000 per year due to lower absenteeism rates.<sup>13</sup>

## Increase in Employee Retention

Providing a worksite lactation support program helps to maintain a stable workforce by reducing employee turnover.<sup>4</sup>

Employees who want to breastfeed their babies are more likely to return to a work place that provides a supportive breastfeeding environment.

- Businesses with lactation support programs boast a post maternity retention rate of 94.2% compared to the national retention rate of 59%.<sup>1</sup>
- Specifically, Mutual of Omaha's lactation support program led to a retention rate of 83% of their maternity workforce compared to the national retention average of 59%.<sup>1</sup>

Since experienced employees are returning to work, businesses can eliminate the cost of recruiting/training new staff. Replacing employees is costly for a company's bottom line and is estimated to be 21.4% of the salary level of the job that is being replaced. For a \$50,000 salaried employee this can cost a company up to \$10,850.<sup>14</sup>

## Increase in Employee Morale and Loyalty



Research shows that women who receive support to express milk at work are more productive and loyal to the company.<sup>9</sup> They also feel this support eases their transition back to work from maternity leave and allows them to return to work sooner.<sup>4</sup> “When employees feel the company takes their interests to heart, they’ll also take the company’s interests to heart”, says Dr. Novelle Nelson, Clinical Psychologist and author of *Make More Money by Making Your Employee’s Happy*.<sup>15</sup>

According to a study done by Suyes, et al., workplace lactation accommodations did not have negative repercussions for other employees. In fact, it promoted positive attitudes towards workplace breastfeeding. Thus, employers wishing to accommodate nursing mothers should not fear negative reactions from other workers.<sup>16</sup>

- Employees of Home Depot taking advantage of their lactation program report higher job satisfaction on monthly program surveys.<sup>13</sup>
- Through a formal evaluation of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power’s lactation program, 835 of employees are more positive about the company, 67% worry less about family concerns on the job, and 67% intend to make the company their long term employer.<sup>13</sup>

## Positive Public Relations and Company Image



Providing a supportive environment for nursing employees enhances a company’s reputation as one that is concerned for the welfare of its employees and their families. This ultimately earns a business a positive self-image in the community.<sup>9</sup> The payoff is significant and is seen in a positive public relations and company image. Word gets out about what companies do and don’t do. Potential employees will hear a company supports breastfeeding and it will attract great employees.

- In a recent survey, 94% of working Mother Medias “100 Best Companies for Working Women” offered a lactation support program.<sup>14</sup>

Employers who provide a supportive environment to help their employees continue breastfeeding when returning from a maternity leave enjoy many benefits that positively affect their bottom line. Providing a support program involves investment of small amount of time and resources and can be implemented quite easily and inexpensively.

## Perceived Barriers for Employers

Employers who do not support or accommodate breastfeeding may do so for several reasons:

- **Physical Space**
- **Cost and loss of productivity**—Employers believe the loss of work time will greatly reduce overall productivity.
- **Effect on other employees**—Employers believe not all employees are comfortable with the mother who is breastfeeding.<sup>17</sup>

Employers don’t realize the cost to support a mom is low and the payout is great. They believe their business does not have the time, money, or space to support a breastfeeding employee.

## Summary

Working women are less likely to breastfeed and breastfeed for a shorter amount of time compared to women who are not working. To increase breastfeeding rates, employers need to support breastfeeding moms in the workplace.

The return on investment is significant with reductions in healthcare costs, employee absenteeism, employee turnover rates and increases in employee retention, morale, and loyalty. The company promotes a positive image by supporting breastfeeding employees making it a desirable place of employment.

## Recommendations

Accommodations for breastfeeding women at work are required by law. This includes reasonable break time for milk expression and a private place, other than a bathroom, to use for milk expression. Employers need to implement programs and policies that support their breastfeeding employees and make provisions for them at work.

- Employers should accommodate working moms so that work is not a barrier to breastfeeding their baby.
- Employers should establish a breastfeeding friendly work environment through the implementation of policies and programs that align with guidelines set forth by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

## Resources for Employers

**Resources are available to assist employers with implementing strategies designed to increase breastfeeding rates at work and create a supportive breastfeeding environment.**

- **AOL WellBaby Program**—Employee wellness program for lactation support which includes lactation consultation and rooms for milk expression or breastfeeding. <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org>
- **Breastfeeding & Working**—Web site with information and advice for working, breastfeeding moms. <http://www.workandpump.com>
- **The Business Case for Breastfeeding**—Program with resources, tool kits, and guidelines to help employers understand the benefits of accommodating breastfeeding moms. <http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/government-in-action/business-case-for-breastfeeding>
- **Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition**— YouTube videos of employees and employers sharing their experiences about lactation support at work. <http://cobfc.org>
- **Employer Lactation Toolkit**—Assists employers in learning more about the new federal workplace lactation law, the business benefits of breastfeeding and provides tools on starting and maintaining a successful lactation program. <http://www.familiesandwork.org/employer-lactation-toolkit-for-employers/>
- **Infant at Work Program**—Kansas State program that enables moms to bring their babies to work during until they are 6 months old. (Kansas Department of Health and Environment). <http://da.kas.gov/ps/subject/arc/resources/doainfant.pdf>
- **Massachusetts Department of Public Health Worksite Wellness Program Toolkit**—Worksite wellness toolkit with information and resources for employers on lactation support. <http://www.mass.gov/evohhs/docs/dph/mass-in-motion/worksite-wellness-toolkit.pdf>
- **National Business Group on Health**—A comprehensive toolkit for employers based on The Business Case for Breastfeeding. <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/pub/f2ffe4f0-2354-d714-5136-79a21e9327ed>
- **The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding**—Describes specific action steps to support breastfeeding in all areas of our society, including the workplace. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/breastfeeding/calltoactiontosupportbreastfeeding.pdf>

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