Creating a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace in Contra Costa County
**Introduction**

Employers have a role to play in support of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding has been shown to be important for the health and development of infants. Employers can benefit from support of breastfeeding through reduced costs, increased job productivity and decreased absenteeism.

More and more women are choosing to breastfeed their infants, but many end breastfeeding prematurely, especially women who return to paid employment in the first year after their baby’s birth. California law requires employers to provide a private space, and break time (paid or unpaid) for breastfeeding mothers to express breastmilk for their infants. Employers can enhance breastfeeding support in the workplace by providing a private space that is pleasant and close to the employee’s work area.

A survey of WIC participants revealed that these mothers faced a variety of challenges to continue breastfeeding after return to paid employment. Despite challenges, many mothers were able to combine breastfeeding and working, especially if their employer was supportive. More prenatal education and post partum lactation support might have helped some mothers to better combine paid employment and breastfeeding.
Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding benefits the mother, the baby, the family, and society. Human milk is the most appropriate feeding for the human infant. There is strong evidence that factors in breast milk protect infants from a wide variety of illnesses including respiratory, digestive tract and ear infections. Studies have shown that breastfeeding is associated with reduced risk of becoming overweight in childhood.

Breastfeeding helps a woman lose the weight she gained during pregnancy, returns her uterus to pre-pregnancy shape, and reduces her risks for breast and ovarian cancer.³

Breastfeeding benefits families by reducing costs of infant feeding. Society benefits from healthier mothers and babies, and less cost to the environment because of reduced use of fuel for formula production and reduced waste disposal.

Most women initiate breastfeeding, but soon begin to use formula.⁴ As a result, exclusive breastfeeding rates fall short of national health goals.⁵

Table 1. Comparison of breastfeeding rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In hospital</th>
<th>3 month exclusive breastfeeding</th>
<th>6 months exclusive breastfeeding</th>
<th>12 months exclusive breastfeeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US Healthy People 2010 goals</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Breastfeeding rates 2004*</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Breastfeeding rates 2004*</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*United States National Immunization Survey, 2004 Births, CDC
Breastfeeding and Employment

Employment impacts breastfeeding duration. In fact, full time employment reduces breastfeeding duration by an average of 8 weeks. Legislators in California recognized the impact of employment on breastfeeding when they enacted a law in 2002 requiring employers to accommodate breastfeeding employees.

Figure 1. The effect of work status on initiation and duration of breastfeeding

![Bar chart showing the effect of work status on breastfeeding duration.](chart.png)
California Lactation Accommodation Law

The law states that all California employers must provide a reasonable amount of break time and make a reasonable effort to provide a private space, other than a toilet stall, close to the employees’ work area, to accommodate an employee desiring to express breastmilk for her baby. The break time may be unpaid if the break time does not run concurrently with paid break time. Violation of this law carries a fine of $100 per day.11

Breastfeeding Benefits Employers

Reduced Health Care Costs
Health care costs and insurance claims are significantly lower for breastfed infants. Excess use of health care services costs an HMO $331 to $475 more for formula fed infants for the most common illnesses.2 Researchers found that prenatal programs and lactation programs reduce overall health care costs.8

Reduced Employee Absenteeism
A substantial proportion of employee’s lost work time can be attributed to child health problems.8 Breastfeeding mothers are half as likely to miss a day of work for a sick child compared to mothers of formula feeding infants.10

Enhanced Business Image
Researchers evaluated the impact of four types of family-friendly benefits: prenatal programs, worksite lactation programs, sick childcare, and flexible working arrangements; all were found to increase employer attractiveness.9

Recommendations for Supporting Breastfeeding Employees.

The United States Breastfeeding Committee recommends the following for basic lactation accommodation at a workplace.12

• A 20 to 30 minute break, paid or unpaid, for both morning and afternoon to nurse her infants or express breastmilk
• A private, clean space, reasonably near her work area for breastfeeding or milk expression
• A clean, safe water source and a sink nearby for washing hands and equipment

Additional components that provide excellent support include:
• A room for exclusive use of breastfeeding employees to breastfeeding or express milk
• An electric breast pump that can be used by employees at work who provide their own collection kits
• Improved aesthetics to promote relaxation
• Employer provided refrigerator space for storage of expressed breastmilk
• Six to twelve weeks paid maternity leave
• Flexible work schedules
• Expanded paid break time
• Written breastfeeding policy communicated to all employees
• Written information about how to contact a skilled lactation care provider

Working Women’s Stories

Fifty-three women enrolled in the Contra Costa WIC Program participated in a survey of their experiences upon returning to work or school and continuing to exclusively breastfeed their infants. The women who participated in the survey borrowed an electric breast pump between November 2006 and October 2007 to express milk for their infant during the hours they were separated in lieu of receiving formula vouchers from the WIC Program. The women were contacted by phone during the week or weekend either at home or at work.
A woman can work in many different kinds of jobs and still be provided with a place and time to express breastmilk for her baby. The survey participants worked in many venues including restaurants, hair salons, daycare, medical offices, business offices, retail stores and schools. One client worked out of her car as a private investigator. Those returning to school were attending high school, junior college and a four-year college.

According to the responses in our survey, work accommodation was a significant factor influencing the length of time women continued breastfeeding. Supportive employers provided a private location (sometimes used for other purposes as well) near a sink with a comfortable chair. Many employers also provided refrigerator space for storing expressed breast milk.

In several cases employers were not supportive and this reduced the amount of time that the women continued exclusive breastfeeding. One woman working in an office that largely employed men felt too uncomfortable to use a pump at work. Another woman said that because her place of work had no breastfeeding policy, she decided to introduce formula even before returning to work. It was difficult for some of the students to find a space at school. Many school administrations have not addressed this issue at a policy level.

Women are more likely to continue using a breast pump that is lightweight and compact. Currently, WIC is only able to loan working women a pump with a large case. Many of the women who were surveyed had difficulty carrying the pump back and forth to work or school because of size and weight. Employers with more than one breastfeeding employee might consider providing an electric pump at the worksite.

Longer maternity leave supports increased duration of breastfeeding. Women who returned to work around 3.5 months or later, pumped for more than 2 months. Women who returned to work 2 months or sooner, used the pump for less than 2 months.

Women may find it hard to talk to their employers about breastfeeding. Many of the women in our survey were reluctant to ask employers for accommodation. Most women were not aware of the California law requiring employers to provide a place and time for expressing breast milk.

Information and support with common problems can help women continue breastfeeding after return to work. For example, many of the moms experienced milk supply problems. One of the survey participants said that her daycare provider had concerns about storing breast milk and preferred to feed formula to infants in her care. Problems such as these can be resolved without ending breastfeeding.

Pumping at work is not the only way to combine work and breastfeeding. Two moms in our survey found that it was easier to have their baby at work, or have the caregiver bring the baby to their worksite for breastfeeding.
Support from Contra Costa WIC

Contra Costa WIC provides good breastfeeding support. All Contra Costa WIC staff are knowledgeable about breastfeeding and the WIC program employs peer breastfeeding counselors and a certified lactation consultant. Many of the survey participants experienced common problems that can result in early ending of breastfeeding if not addressed. According to the participants, the support received from WIC assisted them in problem solving and extended the time they were able to breastfeed exclusively.

Conclusion

Breastfeeding is important for good health and development of infants. Employment outside the home is more and more common for mothers of infants. Employment has been shown to reduce breastfeeding duration. Employers have a role to play in supporting breastfeeding and they benefit from supporting breastfeeding through lower health care costs, lower absenteeism and higher employee retention and morale. Employers can support breastfeeding and comply with California law by providing adequate private space and break time for breastfeeding mothers to express breast milk for their infants. Our survey revealed that support of breastfeeding in the workplace varied and could be improved. Other factors such as length of maternity leave also affected breastfeeding duration. More information for employers and mothers about the importance of breastfeeding and how to combine it with working outside the home is needed.
References
1. Thomas M. Ball, Anne L. Wright. Pediatrics 1999, 103(4) 870-876
12. Workplace breastfeeding support, United States Breastfeeding Committee. www.usbreastfeeding.org

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