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## THE NEED FOR BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT

Almost 400,000 women give birth in Texas each year. Most of these new mothers will return to work soon after their child is born—58 percent return to work by the time their baby is only 3 months old.<sup>1</sup>

*More than half of Texas women who return to work are unable to reach their breastfeeding goals.*

More than 75 percent of new mothers in Texas will breastfeed their newborns, but only 71 percent of women who work outside of their homes will initiate breastfeeding.<sup>2</sup> Fewer than 25 percent of women are able to breastfeed for as long as is recommended by health professionals.

Studies show that full-time employment decreases breastfeeding by an average of more than eight weeks, that mothers are most likely to wean their infants within the first month after returning to work, and that only 10 percent of full-time working women exclusively breastfeed for six months.<sup>3,4</sup>

Almost 60 percent of working mothers in Texas report they are unable to breastfeed for as long as they want to.<sup>2</sup> The need to return to work is the number one reason for early discontinuation of breastfeeding, or not attempting to breastfeed at all.<sup>2</sup>

*Women need worksite lactation support.*

During the early weeks after giving birth, a woman's baby and her body work together to establish a milk supply and breastfeeding pattern designed to meet her baby's physical and developmental needs. A woman's body responds to the rhythms of her baby's eating patterns, and maintenance of her milk supply depends on feeding her baby or expressing her breastmilk in coordination with these regular patterns.

When a woman is separated from her baby for more than a few hours, she must express her milk. Missing even one pumping session can have undesirable effects, including discomfort, leaking, inflammation, infection, decreased milk production, and breastfeeding cessation.

## How can you support your breastfeeding employees?

The U.S. Surgeon General<sup>5</sup> and Healthy People 2020<sup>6</sup> recommend that employers provide a comfortable, private place, other than a bathroom, and reasonable break time to express breastmilk during the workday. In general, women need 20-30 minutes approximately every two to three hours to express breastmilk or breastfeed, though needs may vary from woman to woman and over the course of the breastfeeding period.

Employers are now required under the Fair Labor Standards Act to provide these minimum supports to non-exempt employees through the first year of their children's lives.

The Surgeon General also recommends that employers develop comprehensive lactation support programs that include employee breastfeeding education and access to clinical lactation support as well as to equipment, such as high-quality electric breast pumps. Providing these types of support is cost-effective for employers, resulting in a 3-to-1 return on investment. Paid maternity leave and workplace programs allowing mothers direct access to their children during the workday are also recommended.

### Notes:

- 1 Johnson, TD. *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns: 2001-2003*. Current Population Report. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau; 2007; 70-113.
- 2 DSHS, *Texas WIC Infant Feeding Practices Survey, 2009*.
- 3 Fein B, Roe B. The effect of work status on initiation and duration of breastfeeding. *Am J Pub Health*. 1998; 88(7): 1042-6.
- 4 Cardenas R, Major D. Combining employment and breastfeeding: Utilizing a work-family conflict framework to understand obstacles and solutions. *J Bus Psychol*. 2005;20(1): 31-51.
- 5 US Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General; 2011. Action 13. Work toward establishing paid maternity leave for all employed mothers. Action 14. Ensure that employers establish and maintain comprehensive, high-quality lactation support programs for their employees. Action 15. Expand the use of programs in the workplace that allow lactating mothers to have direct access to their babies.
- 6 Healthy People 2020 Objective MICH-22: Increase the proportion of employers who have worksite lactation support programs. Available from: <http://www.healthypeople.gov/>.