Breast feeding is not just a family issue – it can be good for staff and business, too. Workplaces that support breast feeding see lower health care costs and fewer turnovers. The business also saves money on time spent training new staff. Parents of breast fed babies are also less likely to miss work due to a sick child. Plus, moms who have breast feeding support at work are more likely to be happier and do a better job.

Breast Feeding by the Numbers

Of the 4 million babies born in the United States each year, roughly 47.2% are breast fed for the first 6 months of life. By 12 months, only 25.5% are still breast fed. The United States Surgeon General and other major health groups say all moms should breast feed their babies from birth to 6 months of age, without using infant formula, water, or other foods. Only 16.3% of babies in the United States are fed only breast milk for 6 months. The Surgeon General also says moms should breast feed for at least 12 months, if possible, while introducing other foods. However, very few moms do this.

In Louisiana, breast feeding rates are even lower than the national average. About half of new moms ever breast feed at all, compared to 76.9% nationally. Only 9.6% continue to breast feed without using any formula for 6 months, compared to 16.3% nationally. Breast feeding rates in New Orleans have not been known in recent years. Still, public health research shows that black and Latina women are less likely to breast feed than white women. Low-income, black women are the least likely to breast feed. At least 60% of people in New Orleans say they are black. Thus, breast feeding is not a very common act.

The Importance of Breast Feeding

Breast feeding research has shown the benefits of breast feeding for babies and how these benefits affect their futures. Babies who are fed formula are more at risk for diarrhea and ear infections compared to breast fed babies. Not breast feeding also increases a baby’s risk of having inflammatory diseases later in life, such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, respiratory infections and asthma. Many of the pros to breast feeding are due to things found in breast milk that boost the immune system and protect the body from inflammation. These also keep the mom from getting sick and lower her risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

The Benefits of Supporting Breast Feeding Staff

The low rates of moms still breast feeding at 6 months shows that there may be barriers keeping them from breast feeding for longer. Going back to work is one of the main reasons why moms stop breast feeding. Black women are more likely than white women to go back to work earlier after birth. Given the gaps in breast feeding and the fact that women make up 47% of the current workforce in the United States, breast feeding support at work is an important topic to promote as a public health issue.

Pumping (or “expressing”) breast milk at work is possible despite concerns from employers and employees. Employers may be worried that supporting breast feeding employees will be costly, take up
space in the office, lower productivity, and make other employees uncomfortable. Similarly, breast feeding employees may fear being judged by others, lack of job security, and lack of space and time to pump milk. However, studies show that breast feeding support programs and policies at work actually benefit both employees and employers.

Employers and businesses could benefit from breast feeding programs and policies in the following ways:

- A possible return of $3 for every $1 invested in breast feeding support at work
- Increased productivity of staff
- Increased camaraderie among staff
- Decreased absenteeism of staff
- Enhanced reputation in the community
- Fewer sick days among staff
- Higher employee retention rates
- Lower healthcare costs

Employers can save money and improve their businesses while helping working moms and their babies have healthy futures.

Taking Action

To address the low rates of breast feeding in the United States, the Department of Health and Human Services featured breast feeding in its Healthy People 2020 plan. The goal is to increase the number of babies who are ever breast fed to 81.9% and the number who are breast fed at 6 months to 60.6%. In addition, it aims for 25.5% of babies to be fed only breast milk at 6 months. The table below provides an overview of the Healthy People 2020 targets and how they compare to the current state and national breast feeding rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ever breast fed</th>
<th>Breast fed at 6 months</th>
<th>Breast fed at 12 months</th>
<th>Exclusively breast fed at 6 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy People 2020</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Breast feeding rates per live births in United States

The Healthy People 2020 plan also includes goals for employers to promote breast feeding at work. By the end of this decade, the government aims to have the percentage of employers with workplace breast feeding support programs rise from 25% to 38%.

Also, with the passage of the Affordable Care Act in March 2010, employers with 50 or more employees now must provide a clean, private space for breast feeding moms to pump milk at work. The law also states that the space must not be a bathroom and that women must have reasonable break time to pump.
In addition to changes on the federal level, state governments are also promoting breast feeding. Research suggests that state breast feeding laws may help increase breast feeding rates for its residents. State laws have been shown to increase breast feeding rates among black women and women with low levels of education. This is promising given that these groups are least likely to start breast feeding.

As of now, 45 states allow moms to breast feed in public, and 28 states have stated that breast feeding in public is not against the law. The following laws exist in Louisiana to support breast feeding:

- As of August 15, 2001, all women are permitted to breast feed in public. Breast feeding is not a violation of public indecency or obscenity laws.
- As of August 15, 2003, it is against the law for childcare centers to discriminate against breast fed babies.
- A joint study was established in 2002 to mandate insurance coverage for mothers who access outpatient lactation services.
- In 2008, the Department of Health and Hospitals was asked to consider providing transportation to hospitals for mothers to breast feed their hospitalized infants.
- Breast feeding supplies are no longer subject to sales tax as of 2011.
- Louisiana law requires at least 10 state-owned buildings to have a dedicated space for women to express milk and/or breast feed a child.
- Effective August 1, 2013, public school boards in Louisiana are required to establish policies that allow female employees to express milk during the school day. Employees must be provided with a private room and reasonable break time to express milk.

Twenty-four states have laws or rules about breast feeding at work and address topics such as break times for nursing employees, ideal places to pump milk at work, and protection from the discrimination of nursing employees. As of now, Louisiana does not have any laws about breast feeding at work. This is a timely topic for government officials to consider for future laws and provisions.

Adding Breast Feeding to the Workplace

Breast feeding support at work does not need to be expensive or hard. The Affordable Care Act only says businesses have to offer the following items to employees:

- A clean, private space that is not a bathroom
  - The space used for expressing milk does not have to be exclusively used for breast feeding. It can be a multi-use space. However, it must be closed to other employees when breast feeding mothers need to express milk.
- Reasonable time to express milk
  - Breast feeding mothers will need to express milk every 3-4 hours. The process takes 15-30 minutes depending on the mom’s routine and the age of the child. Moms will need more time to express milk in the first months following birth.
Based on a review of literature and existing policies, additional provisions may be needed to maximize the success and return on investment for workplace breast feeding programs. Research has shown that working moms with access to a dedicated breast feeding room (not space) are more than 2 times as likely to continue breast feeding beyond 6 months after returning to work. Employees are more likely to breast feed for a longer duration if they receive encouragement from colleagues and supervisors and if the workplace has a company policy for breast feeding breaks. Listed below are recommendations to guide employers as they develop breast feeding support programs.

**Tips for a Basic Breast Feeding Support Program at Work:** 9,10,22,23

- Find a private space (a minimum of 4 x 5 feet) that employees can use to pump milk. Be sure the room has a comfortable chair, sink, table, clean water source and electrical socket.
- Find a place for employees to store breast milk, such as a refrigerator or personal cooler.
- Allow employees to be flexible with the time of day that they choose to pump milk. Women cannot always plan a set time that they will need to breast feed or pump, especially in the first few months following birth.
- Hand out the information on the breast feeding program to all new employees and women seeking maternity leave.
- Encourage women to use breast pumps to shorten the time needed to express milk.

**Tips for an Advanced Breast Feeding Support Program at Work** (in addition to the basic services listed above): 9,10,22,23

- Select a room to serve as the main breast feeding room that will not be used for any other purpose.
- Make a company policy that outlines the breast feeding support program.
- Talk to an insurance provider to see if breast pumps can be offered at a discount or free-of-charge for employees.
- Purchase an electric-grade hospital breast pump and provide attachment kits for employees.
- Provide employees with educational materials on breast feeding and a list of local resources.
- Give new mothers time to breast feed their infants off-site.

For more information on breast feeding at work or how to start a workplace breast feeding program, please visit [http://womenshealth.tulane.edu](http://womenshealth.tulane.edu).

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23 Tsai, S.Y. (2013). Impact of a breastfeeding-friendly workplace on an employed mother’s intention to continue breastfeeding after returning to work. Breastfeeding Medicine, 8(2): 210-216.