

# **Making It Work**

## Employers Supporting Breastfeeding Families





A photograph of a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a light pink t-shirt, smiling warmly as she holds a baby. The baby is resting its head against her cheek. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting with light-colored walls and a window with blinds on the right side.

## **Making It Work:** Employers Supporting Breastfeeding Families

Accommodating nursing mothers in the workplace can work for YOUR business. Learn how!

More than 80% of women choose to nurse their baby, and many plan to continue once they return to work. Your support will make this possible. The requirements are simple: a clean private area and breaks to express milk around the time the baby would normally feed, generally every 2–3 hours.

Suggested citation: NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health. 2020. *Making It Work: Employers Supporting Breastfeeding Families*. Raleigh, North Carolina.

North Carolina's Making It Work tools, adapted with permission from the New York State Department of Health, provide essential information for employers, mothers, their families, and community advocates to support breastfeeding.

## Good for Business

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Providing support for nursing women at work is good for your business. Companies across America are providing lactation support programs as part of their family-friendly benefits. They've learned that lactation accommodations at work produce a **3 to 1 return on investment** which is attributed to:

### ■ Lower health care costs

Mutual of Omaha found that their newborn health care costs are **three times less** when employees participate in the lactation program. They saved \$2,146 for each employee.<sup>1</sup>

### ■ Reduced rate of absenteeism due to infant illness (among both mothers and fathers)

A major insurance company, CIGNA, found a 77% reduction in lost work time since babies who receive their mother's milk are healthier. The company saved more than \$60,000 per year in lower absenteeism rates.<sup>1</sup>

### ■ Lower turnover rates

A 9-company study found that the average return to work rate is 94% when a lactation program is provided.<sup>1</sup>

### ■ Improved employee productivity and loyalty

Many companies report that their employees are more productive and loyal when they provide women with lactation support such as time and space to express milk at work.



SOURCE: UNITED STATES BREASTFEEDING COMMITTEE

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1. The Business Case for Breastfeeding. 2008. Washington, D.C. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Health Bureau. [womenshealth.gov/files/documents/bcfb\\_business-case-for-breastfeeding-for-business-managers.pdf](https://www.womenshealth.gov/files/documents/bcfb_business-case-for-breastfeeding-for-business-managers.pdf)



# **Accommodating Nursing Mothers at Work is the LAW**

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was amended in 2010 with the passage of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act requiring employers to accommodate nursing women who wish to express milk for their infants during the work period.<sup>2</sup> The law stipulates that employers must provide nonexempt (hourly) employees the following:

- **Reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for up to one year after birth**
- **A private place that is not a bathroom that is shielded from view and free of intrusion from co-workers and the public\***

In North Carolina, the Office of State Human Resources Lactation Policy for state employees, effective July 1, 2010, states "It is the policy of North Carolina State Government to assist working mothers with the transition back to work following the birth of a child by providing lactation support. A lactation support program allows a nursing mother to express breast milk periodically during the work day." For more information, visit: [osh.nc.gov/policies-forms/workplace-wellness/lactation-support](http://osh.nc.gov/policies-forms/workplace-wellness/lactation-support).



2. Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Section 7(r) of the Fair Labor Standards Act – Break Time for Nursing Mothers Provision. 2010. Washington, D.C. U.S. Department of Labor. [dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers/Sec7rFLSA\\_btm.htm](http://dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers/Sec7rFLSA_btm.htm)

\*Businesses employing fewer than 50 people may file for an undue hardship exemption.



- Compliance is possible in nearly every work setting, and there are many resources to help. For more information about these laws, please visit the website of the U.S. Department of Labor at [dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers](http://dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers).
- The National Conference of State Legislatures provides information on the North Carolina law: [ncsl.org/research/health/breastfeeding-state-laws.aspx](http://ncsl.org/research/health/breastfeeding-state-laws.aspx).
- The North Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition provides up to date information on breastfeeding and laws in North Carolina: [ncbfc.org/breastfeeding-laws-and-regulations](http://ncbfc.org/breastfeeding-laws-and-regulations).







## Simple Steps to Compliance

- 1** Discuss needs of nursing women in your workplace.
- 2** Develop a plan to address those needs.
- 3** Contact community resources for assistance, including the local breastfeeding coalition or public health department.
- 4** Review your company policies and revise as needed.
- 5** Identify space and time options that comply with the law.
- 6** Train supervisors and co-workers on the laws and company policies.
- 7** Promote your lactation support services.



## Did You Know?

### Benefits of Breastfeeding<sup>3,4</sup>

#### Research studies show that breastfed babies:

- Have fewer ear infections and respiratory infections
- Have fewer digestive problems and are less likely to be constipated
- Are less likely to be obese later in life
- Are less likely to develop cancer or diabetes in their lifetime
- Are less likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

#### Research studies show moms who breastfeed:

- Recover faster from pregnancy and childbirth
- Have a reduced risk of postpartum mood disorders
- May be less likely to develop breast and ovarian cancer
- May be less likely to develop type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease

**Studies show the U.S. could save more than \$13 billion in health care costs and save the lives of nearly 1,000 babies if 90% of women nurse their children exclusively to at least 6 months.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Surgeon General has issued the *Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding*, urging employers to provide basic lactation accommodations to help women continue to give their milk to their baby after returning to work.<sup>6</sup>**

3. Victora C, Bahl R, Barros A, França G, Horton S, Krasevec J, Murch S, Sankar M, Walker N, Rollins N. Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. *The Lancet*. 2016; 387(10017), 475-490.

4. Dieterich C, Felice J, O'Sullivan E, Rasmussen K. Breastfeeding and Health Outcomes for the Mother-Infant Dyad. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*. 2013;60(1), 31-48. [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3508512](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3508512)

5. Bartick M, Reinhold A. The burden of suboptimal breastfeeding in the United States: a pediatric cost analysis. *Pediatrics*. 2010; 125, e1028-e1056.

6. The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding. 2011. Rockville, MD. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General. [surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/breastfeeding/index.html](https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/breastfeeding/index.html)



# Basic Needs of Employees

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## Support

Nursing mothers at work need information, support, and simple accommodations to reach their infant feeding goals. Providing a little extra break time and space to express their milk is a temporary need. Be sure to inform women about their nursing options prior to their maternity leave. Employers and supervisors set the tone for an environment of support that enables women to feel comfortable and confident using lactation services, so don't forget to train supervisors on how to identify and respond to requests. (See "Checklist for Employers" on page 10.) Human resource staff are a valuable resource to help both employees and supervisors find solutions that will work in each situation. Some companies also establish lactation policies to be sure consistent support is provided for all women who need lactation services. (See "Sample Worksite Lactation Policy" at [workwellinc.com/NCMakingItWork.php](http://workwellinc.com/NCMakingItWork.php).)

## Expressing Milk

Breastfeeding moms make milk continuously. To maintain milk supply, women must either feed the baby directly or remove their milk with a breast pump regularly. When milk is not removed regularly, this signals her body to make less milk. Providing regular breaks throughout the work day allows moms to continue to maintain their milk supply. Many women choose to express their milk when they are at work and cannot be with their baby. The milk can be safely stored in a small refrigerator in or near the lactation room, in an insulated lunch bag, or in a general employee refrigerator.

### Did You Know?

**A woman's nursing needs at work may change from time to time. Immediately following maternity leave, moms may need to express milk a little more often. Babies also go through periods of rapid growth from time to time, requiring mom to add an extra milk expression session at work for a few days to keep up with baby's demand. At other times, babies will seem to need less. Ongoing dialogue with women will help assure that her needs and the needs of the business are being addressed.**



## Time to Express Milk

It takes approximately 20 minutes for most women to express their milk (not counting the time to get to and from the milk expression area), though some women might require a little longer at first. Most women do this around the time the baby would normally feed, generally every 2–3 hours. Most women are able to use their regular breaks or meal period and will clock in and out as usual. If extra time is needed, they can discuss options with their supervisor.

## Private Space

The law requires a private area free from intrusion from co-workers and the public. Privacy can be assured with a lock on a door, signage indicating the space is occupied, and window coverings as needed. A quiet, private area will also help her relax so milk expression is quicker and more efficient. There are lots of options, including the employee's own office if it is private, the office of a co-worker or supervisor, a conference room, or other small private area not in use. Many companies create a designated lactation space if they have more than one employee who would benefit from it. The room can be as simple or as elaborate as desired. A space large enough to accommodate a chair and a flat surface for the pump is all that is needed. Ideally, the room will be located near running water and will include an electric outlet for plugging in the breast pump and a door that can be secured.



# Making It Work

## Employers Supporting Breastfeeding Families

### Checklist for Employers

**When an employee requests lactation accommodations, the following checklist can help you plan.**

- Discuss the company's lactation policy for supporting nursing women prior to the employee's maternity leave, so you can make any arrangements needed while she is away.
- Praise her! Tell her you will support her decision to breastfeed.
- Assure that her direct supervisor and other relevant managers are aware of her needs.
- Review the employee's typical work/break schedule to arrange for milk expression breaks. (See "Sample Pumping Schedules" in Making It Work: Breastfeeding Moms Returning to Work or School on page 12.)
- Arrange for coverage (such as using "floaters") while she is away from her work station.
- Identify private space that is not a bathroom that is functional for expressing milk. (See "Solutions for Non-Office Environments" on pages 11–15.)
- Seek feedback from the employee and her supervisor.

Studies show the U.S. could save more than \$13 billion in health care costs and save the lives of nearly 1,000 babies if 90% of women nurse their infants exclusively to at least 6 months.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Surgeon General has issued the Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding, urging employers to provide basic lactation accommodations to help women continue to give their milk to their baby after returning to work.<sup>6</sup>

**Would you like to receive recognition for being a breastfeeding-friendly employer? Community partners that are breastfeeding-friendly for patrons and/or employees can apply and receive an award from the North Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition. To learn more and apply, visit: [ncbfc.org/business-case-for-breastfeeding-1](http://ncbfc.org/business-case-for-breastfeeding-1)**



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**







## Did You Know?

**Breaks are predictable and can be planned; absences due to sick children are much harder to plan for.**

## Solutions for Non-Office Environments

Employers of all types and sizes have found many creative solutions for complying with the law. Here are a few examples.

### RETAIL STORES



- Dressing room converted into a lactation space
- Manager's office
- Converted utility closet
- Partition or privacy screen in an employee lounge or other area
- Private area constructed in the corner of the warehouse using cubicle-type partitions or metal shelving and plywood
- Small room or area in the back of the store
- Shared space with other stores (ex: a mall or shopping center lactation room that can be shared by several retail stores)
- Planned coverage during nursing breaks while the employee is not on the floor; scheduled breaks planned in advance and use of "floaters" can help

## RESTAURANTS



- Manager's office
- Converted utility closet
- Partition or privacy screen in a corner of the kitchen area
- Working with the employee to arrange for a caregiver to bring baby to the work setting for feedings
- Allowing the employee to work "split shifts" by working during the busier lunch and dinner periods and going home between shifts to breastfeed the baby directly
- Planned coverage while employee is taking a nursing break; scheduled breaks planned in advance can help

## SMALL BUSINESSES



- Manager's office
- Partition or privacy screen
- Small room or area in the back of the business
- Converting small storage space area into a temporary lactation room
- Shared space with other nearby small businesses
- Working with the employee to arrange for a caregiver to bring baby to the work setting for feedings.

### Did You Know?

Guidelines recommend that if a partition is used for a nursing area, it be at least seven (7) feet high to protect the woman's privacy.



## AGRICULTURE OR CONSTRUCTION SITE



- Pop-up privacy tent
- Constructing a portable structure for privacy
- Small travel trailer
- Manager's office in a portable building
- Taking scheduled breaks that are planned in advance

## MANUFACTURING PLANT



SOURCE: UNITED STATES BREASTFEEDING COMMITTEE

- Scheduled breaks that are planned in advance
- Use of "floaters" to cover when nursing breaks are needed
- Private offices of managers, foremen, or other personnel
- Small spaces converted into milk expression areas
- Constructed space using cubicle partitions or metal shelving and plywood

***"My advice to other companies is that this [providing accommodations for breastfeeding moms at work] is much easier than you think it is. There's no question that healthier employees are more productive. This is just the right thing to do."***

**— Human Resources Director, Manufacturing Company**

## HEALTH CARE AGENCIES



- Empty patient or exam room(s)
- Conference or board room
- Closet or storage area that is not always in use
- Converted utility closet
- Office of a supervisor or manager

### Did You Know?

Nursing moms appreciate a space that is cozy and comfortable. When they are relaxed, milk expression is more efficient. If you are creating a special room designated for nursing moms, consider painting it a warm color and hanging a bulletin board for moms to post photos of their babies.

## HOTELS



- Empty guest room
- Converted utility closet
- Unused meeting room
- Office of a supervisor or manager

### SPECIAL TIP TO TRY

#### Finding Space

Look for a little space in your work area. This might be an odd-shaped area that is not used much, but could easily be sectioned off with a partition or wall as a small lactation area.



## EMERGENCY PERSONNEL



- Emergency medical technicians: back of an ambulance not in use
- Fire fighters: partition that provides privacy, office of the fire chief or other personnel
- Police officers: private office of another officer or temporary assignment to desk duty
- Locating lactation rooms in key locations throughout the community

## SCHOOLS



SOURCE: UNITED STATES BREASTFEEDING COMMITTEE



- Coverage provided by the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, teacher aids, or other personnel
- Private space in the school nurse clinic, guidance counselor's office, principal's office, rooms used by speech therapist or other staff, or another small space
- Small closet converted for dedicated lactation space

***“We’ve made it a priority to make sure that our breastfeeding moms have time to pump during the day. It benefits our staff, the whole culture, and climate in our school.”***

**—Principal, Elementary School**

## Gaining Co-Worker Buy-In

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Managers and supervisors set a positive tone by educating employees about the breastfeeding-friendly policies of the company and ways they will be supported, and communicating those policies to other workers during new staff orientation, or if questions arise. Supervisors should respect the privacy of women who may not want the entire workplace to know about their nursing needs while assuring that they receive the support they need. Co-workers who have questions about the lactation policy can be reminded about the benefits of lactation support including lower health care costs, absenteeism rates, and turnover rates that benefit everyone in the workplace. Lactation accommodations also help reinforce the company's sensitivity to family needs of workers. This helps create a culture of teamwork and mutual support that builds productivity and loyalty among all workers.





## Frequently Asked Questions

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**Are we required to provide a *designated lactation room*?** No. The law does not require companies to construct or develop a designated lactation room, though companies with several breastfeeding employees may find this is helpful. Some companies establish a temporary lactation room that can be used for other purposes when it is not needed for lactating mothers.

**Must time taken to express milk be paid?** No. The law does not require a company to pay their employees break time for expressing milk, though some employers feel it is easier to do so than keeping track of time taken. If your company provides standard breaks for other employees and the woman chooses to use that time to express milk, she must be compensated in the same way other employees are when they take breaks.

**What if she needs more time than is provided by the break?** If more time is needed than the usual breaks provide, employers can discuss options such as unpaid leave, allowing the employee to take a shorter lunch break to make up the difference, or asking the employee to come in earlier or leave later to make up the time.

**How much does a lactation room cost?** If the employer chooses to create a designated room for lactation, costs will vary, depending on the employer and the amenities chosen. If walls must be constructed or painted, costs will be higher. Basic requirements are a way to secure privacy (such as a lock or key pad), a chair to sit on, an electrical outlet, and a shelf or other flat surface for the pump. Additional expenses to make the rooms more relaxing and comfortable could include providing a breast pump for employees, including a small refrigerator for storing milk, wall art, soft lighting, a telephone, a bulletin board for posting pictures of babies, or other decorations.

**Can more than one woman share the lactation room?** Many employers provide multiple-use rooms to allow more than one woman to express milk. Under the federal law, nursing mothers are entitled to privacy from “co-workers and the public” and therefore cannot be forced to express milk in the presence of other nursing mothers. Many businesses create nursing “stations” within a larger room with privacy partitions.

**What is the liability risk?** Risks are quite low. Occupational Safety and Health Administration considers human milk to be food, not a biohazard, so human milk can be safely stored in the employee refrigerator. Potential liability from using breast pump equipment (if provided by the employer) is easily addressed by asking women to sign a release of responsibility to the employer. If the employer allows a caregiver to bring the baby to the mother during breaks for feedings, employees can sign a similar release of responsibility. (See example at [babiesatwork.org](http://babiesatwork.org).)



SOURCE: UNITED STATES BREASTFEEDING COMMITTEE



SOURCE: UNITED STATES BREASTFEEDING COMMITTEE

## Helpful Resources

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### ***Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute (CGBI)***

**[sph.unc.edu/cgbi/carolina-global-breastfeeding-institute](http://sph.unc.edu/cgbi/carolina-global-breastfeeding-institute)**

Research, service and training in an academic setting. Community program implementation for breastfeeding-friendly health care and child care.

### ***Guidelines from the North Carolina Office of State Human Resources***

**[oshr.nc.gov/policies-forms/workplace-wellness/lactation-support](http://oshr.nc.gov/policies-forms/workplace-wellness/lactation-support)**

The North Carolina lactation policy for state employees.

### ***International Lactation Consultant Association***

**[portal.ilca.org/i4a/memberDirectory/index.cfm?directory\\_id=18&pageID=4349](http://portal.ilca.org/i4a/memberDirectory/index.cfm?directory_id=18&pageID=4349)**

The "Find a Lactation Consultant Directory" lists lactation consultants available to assist with corporate lactation support programs.

### ***Making It Work: Supporting Worksite Lactation Accommodations***

**[workwellnc.com/NCMakingItWork.php](http://workwellnc.com/NCMakingItWork.php)**

Basic tenets of the U.S. Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Section 4207 which amends the Fair Labor Standards Act.

### ***North Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition (NCBC)***

**[ncbfc.org](http://ncbfc.org)**

Breastfeeding resources, national and state laws, as well as a listing of regional breastfeeding coalitions across the state. NCBC focuses on several projects, one of which is the Breastfeeding-Friendly Employers Award & Breastfeeding-Friendly Community Partners Award.

### ***North Carolina Division of Public Health, Nutrition Services Branch***

**[nutritionnc.com/breastfeeding](http://nutritionnc.com/breastfeeding)**

Resources and information from the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) for employers, families, and health care providers.





SOURCE: UNITED STATES BREASTFEEDING COMMITTEE

### ***The Business Case for Breastfeeding***

**[womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-home-work-and-public/breastfeeding-and-going-back-work/business-case](https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-home-work-and-public/breastfeeding-and-going-back-work/business-case)**

Free resources with bottom-line benefits for employers establishing comprehensive lactation support programs; easy steps for implementing; options for space, time, education, and support; reproducible templates that can be tailored to the business; and employee educational materials. Published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

### ***United States Breastfeeding Committee***

**[usbreastfeeding.org](https://usbreastfeeding.org)**

Links to numerous national resources and a listing of state breastfeeding coalitions.

### ***United States Department of Labor***

**[dol.gov/agencies/whd/nursing-mothers](https://dol.gov/agencies/whd/nursing-mothers)**

Federal law requires employers to provide a space, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view, and reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth.

### ***United States Surgeon General***

**[hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/breastfeeding/index.html](https://hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/breastfeeding/index.html)**

"Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding" and "National Prevention Strategy."

### ***WorkWell NC***

**[workwellnc.com](https://workwellnc.com) and [workwellnc.com/scorecard-maternal\\_and\\_lactation\\_support.php](https://workwellnc.com/scorecard-maternal_and_lactation_support.php)**

Resources to implement affordable and effective worksite wellness programs. This includes information for worksites that want to provide lactation support.





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[ncbfc.org/making-it-work](http://ncbfc.org/making-it-work)



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