

# COVID-19 & Breastfeeding Webinar Series

## Webinar 3: Supporting Breastfeeding Employees During COVID

### Webinar Goal

- The COVID-19 & Breastfeeding webinar series aimed to enhance and strengthen Healthy Start grantees' capacity to adapt their breastfeeding support in order to meet their client's needs via virtual platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The third webinar explored the basic provisions required for breastfeeding employees under the law, solutions for milk expression in common non-office settings, and strategies to support safe milk expression at work during the pandemic.
- The webinar series was hosted by the Healthy Start TA & Support Center in partnership with Cathy Carothers, BLA, IBCLC, FILCA, Co-founder and Co-Director of Every Mother, Inc.



### Common Barriers to Breastfeeding Among Employed Women

Studies show that up to 60% of women stop breastfeeding sooner than they would like, and half of new mothers say their plans for employment affect their breastfeeding decisions. Around 80% of breastfeeding women discontinue breastfeeding within the first month back at work.

#### **Common barriers breastfeeding women face include:**

- Short maternity leave
- Emotional and physical demands of breastfeeding
- Lack of support from employer and co-workers
- Lack of accommodations in the workplace (e.g., time, space)
- Lack of support from family
- Emotional challenges (e.g., role conflicts, competing demands, fatigue, sadness, guilt)

#### **These barriers are further compounded for low-wage workers, who often also face:**

- Earlier return to work
- Job settings that are not conducive to milk expression or breastfeeding
- Lack of autonomy and flexibility in the workplace
- Lack of job security (leading to hesitancy around raising breastfeeding needs with supervisors)
- Erratic work schedules or nonstandard hours
- Childcare concerns

### Federal & State Legislation Around Milk Expression in the Workplace

Under two federal laws – the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and the Affordable Care Act – employers are required to provide hourly workers with:

- Reasonable time to express milk (these breaks do not have to be paid)
- A private space (that is not a bathroom) to express milk

Companies with fewer than 50 employees must comply with these requirements unless they can demonstrate that doing so would pose an undue financial hardship. Companies in states that have laws providing greater protection than these federal laws must follow their state laws.



## Federal & State Legislation Around Milk Expression in the Workplace (continued)

Other legislation that contains provisions for breastfeeding employees include:

- Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits employers from firing, harassing, or retaliating against workers for breastfeeding or pumping at work
- State Pregnancy Workers Fairness laws, which are available in 30 states and 5 cities
- Other state laws providing accommodations for medical conditions

*Additional Resources:*

- [U.S. Department of Labor's Break Time for Nursing Mothers](#)
- [Center for Work Life Law's Your COVID-19 Workplace Rights: Breastfeeding and Lactation](#)
  - Free Legal Hotline: 415-703-8276
  - Free Legal Hotline Email: [hotline@worklifelaw.org](mailto:hotline@worklifelaw.org)
- [A Better Balance's How to Talk to your Boss about Your Pump](#)

## Helping Mothers Prepare to Return to Work

Women will need different forms of support depending on where they are in their breastfeeding and postpartum journey. By tailoring your support before, during, and after they give birth, you can meet participants where they are and support them in achieving their breastfeeding goals.

### ***During Pregnancy:***

- Educate women on their rights around breastfeeding in the workplace
- Help women identify their hopes, needs, and goals around breastfeeding
- Include family members in counseling and education efforts
- Encourage women to:
  - Begin the discussion around pumping at work with her employer now
  - Document all requests for accommodations
  - Develop her [breastfeeding plan](#)

### ***During Maternity Leave:***

- Help women establish a plan for breastfeeding after returning to work
- Prepare women to establish milk production through evidence-based practices:
  - Skin-to-skin contact in the first hour after birth
  - Frequent milk removal
  - Exclusive breastfeeding to build production capacity
- Encourage women to:
  - Seek lactation support if they face problems early on
  - Build their support system, including their partners, family members, and friends



## Helping Mothers Prepare to Return to Work (continued)

### After Returning to Work:

- Support women in navigating challenges they may face with their employer or coworker
- Encourage women to:
  - Finding a relaxing area to express milk, if possible
  - Set up a [realistic pumping schedule](#)
  - Achieve their “magic number” (i.e., the number of times each day a mother’s breasts need to be well drained of milk to keep her milk production stable)
  - Use their supply, but always aim to replace it!
  - Exclusively breastfeed when home with the baby
  - Breastfeed or express milk during night when prolactin levels may be higher
  - Lean on their support system as they transition back to work

## Safely Expressing Milk in the Workplace

During and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, there are steps women can take to safely express milk in the workplace:

- Wear a mask, wash hands frequently, and use hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean the outside of breast pump with antibacterial wipes and follow [the CDC guidelines](#) for cleaning pump parts.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.
- Practice physical distancing from others and avoid hand shaking.
- Avoid sharing office space to express milk at work.



## References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity. [online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>
2. World Health Organization. 2020. Frequently Asked Questions: Breastfeeding and COVID-19 For Health Care Workers. 1st ed. [ebook] Geneva, Switzerland. Available at: [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/maternal-health/faqs-breastfeeding-and-covid-19\\_805d4ce8-2329-4227-9261-695afa68b32c.pdf?sfvrsn=d839e6c0\\_5](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/maternal-health/faqs-breastfeeding-and-covid-19_805d4ce8-2329-4227-9261-695afa68b32c.pdf?sfvrsn=d839e6c0_5)
3. Gribble, K., Marinelli, K., Tomori, C. and Gross, M., 2020. Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic Response for Breastfeeding, Maternal Caregiving Capacity and Infant Mental Health. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 36(4), pp.591-603..
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021. Interim Guidance on Breastfeeding and Breast Milk Feeds in the Context of COVID-19. [online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/care-for-breastfeeding-women.html>
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. Breastfeeding and Caring for Newborns if You Have COVID-19. [online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>