

Ways for NRCS Employees to Express Milk in the “Field” Workplace

January 2011

Did you know that when the health care reform bill was passed in March 2010, it stated that all employers must provide breastfeeding employees with reasonable break time and a private, non-bathroom place to express breast milk during the workday, up until the child’s first birthday?

Breast milk is the most complete infant food and breastfeeding is the most economical and convenient way for a mother to feed her baby. Providing working mothers with a space to express breast milk gives them the opportunity to extend the bonding period. New mothers are more content when they can combine work with breastfeeding.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other sources, some of the benefits of breast-feeding for babies are:

- ▶ Fewer ear and respiratory infections
- ▶ Protection against SIDS--sudden infant death syndrome
- ▶ Lower mortality rate for infants
- ▶ Fewer allergies
- ▶ Reduced incidences of cancer
- ▶ Action as first brain food to help to set down the proper matrix for humans
- ▶ Reduced medical costs for both mother and baby

Documented benefits for mothers include:

- ▶ Fewer incidents of pre-menopausal ovarian and breast cancer
- ▶ Ability to eat more while potentially losing weight
- ▶ Potential savings of as much as \$100 per month in formula costs
- ▶ Strong, early bonding of mother and child
- ▶ Less time missed from work due to improved health of baby

Benefits to the Agency

Employees are more likely to return to work after childbirth when their workplace provides a supportive environment for continued breastfeeding. Being able to retain experienced employees after childbirth means lowering or eliminating the costs to hire temporary staff or to recruit, hire, and train replacement staff, not to mention the costs from lost revenue while getting these new staff up to speed. A supportive environment builds loyalty, improves morale, and increases job satisfaction.

Employees who are Nursing

There are several steps to be taken to successfully express breast milk in the “field” workplace environment. While pregnant determine what form of feeding you want for your child and if breast milk is preferable, then develop a "pumping plan" prior to giving birth and discuss it with your supervisor and co-workers before going on leave. Provide your supervisor and co-workers with information so they are informed and knowledgeable about the benefits of breastfeeding children, your desire to express breast milk at work, and ways you can do this with minimum impact to them. You cannot assume that your supervisor or coworkers are knowledgeable

about breastfeeding and all it entails. Advance planning will give you time to ensure a workable space is available for you to use when you return to work.

Some hospitals and physicians have programs and information that assist businesses on how to make their workplaces friendly for employees who are expressing breast milk. Contact your hospital or physician as they may be a good resource to help you develop a plan. Meetings and conferences must be planned for. In some cases, you should discuss your need to express breast milk with meeting planners and determine in advance what arrangements can be made for a place for you to do so. Also, you may need to let the meeting leader know that when you leave the room it is your scheduled time to express milk not because you are skipping the meeting.

Supervisors of Employees who are Nursing

An employee who is nursing needs a private place that has an electrical outlet, a small table, a chair and a door that locks. Offices are preferable, but if one is not available, see if an office can be borrowed or a conference room is available. Perhaps your office can be used. If there is an available office or conference room with large glass walls, cover them for privacy purposes.

Perhaps you can find out if your service center counterparts, such as the Farm Service Agency or Rural Development have office space they are not using that your employee can borrow. Lastly, look outside the office at businesses nearby and find out if there is an empty office or conference room your employee could use. One employee shared that a museum next door to her field office had space she could use to express milk.

Each woman is different; however, it takes anywhere from 10 – 25 minutes for a mother to pump milk and clean the pump equipment. Most women need to pump 3-4 times a day to maintain milk supply. Breastfeeding mothers have issues associated with not having adequate time to pump. Mastitis, a serious and painful infection, caused when breast milk is not properly removed from the breasts, can lead to fever and require antibiotics. Another serious issue with breastfeeding mothers who don't get to pump often enough at work is lowered milk production.

It is important that you set the proper and respectful tone for how staff will respond to a co-worker who is pumping milk for her baby. You must be proactive. Not all adults have experience with the concept and practicalities of breastfeeding. Talk to your staff in advance and provide education and information. If you notice some resentment from staff about the breaks the employee takes or hear rude comments from coworkers about a breastfeeding mother, it is your job to address them, just as you would address a racist or sexist comment in the workplace. Remind them that employees take coffee or smoke breaks during the day and pumping milk is for a good cause.

Remember, in spite of the space limitations that some offices have, with some advance planning and open communication between you and your employees, you can minimize issues for employees who are expressing breast milk at work. Understand that this is not a permanent situation as most mothers pump milk for 18 months or less.

Doing what you can to assist and support employees to successfully return to work and breastfeed sends the message that all employees are valued. It is important to NRCS to keep experienced employees on the job and is one way of transforming the culture of our agency. As a supervisor, it is important that you take steps to help employees reach their breastfeeding goals and encourage employees to exhibit a positive, accepting attitude and protect our investment in staff by showing that we truly value all employees.

Sources:

Health Care Reform Bill

<http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/Workplace/WorkplaceSupport/WorkplaceSupportinHealthCareReform/tabid/175/Default.aspx>

Office of Personnel Management- Establishing a Nursing Mothers Program

http://www.opm.gov/employment_and_benefits/worklife/officialdocuments/handbooksguides/nursing/index.asp#Government%20Agencies%20with%20Successful%20Nursing%20Mothers%20Programs

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Women’s Health

The Business Case for Breastfeeding

www.womenshealth.gov

Additional information:

The National Breastfeeding Helpline – (800) 994-9662

<http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm>

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Topics/BreastfeedingFactSheet.pdf>

<http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs73.htm>

http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Learning_Center/loving_support.html

http://wicworks.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=12&tax_level=1&tax_subject=642

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/government-programs/business-case-for-breastfeeding/index.cfm>

Government Agencies with Successful Nursing Mothers Programs

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

U.S. Department of State

U.S. Department of Transportation

U.S. General Accounting Office

U.S. Department of Labor

National Security Agency

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