

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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Breastfeeding-friendly worksites benefit new mothers, offer high return on investment for employers

One of the most pivotal times in a woman's career, both for herself and her employer, is the months immediately following the birth of a baby. Making the decision to return to work is both an emotional and a financial decision – one an employer can make easier by supporting breastfeeding for working mothers.

August 1-7 is World Breastfeeding Week, said Worksite Wellness Coordinator Jessica Davies with Panhandle Public Health District. "A woman employed away from her home can continue to breastfeed her child. She should breastfeed as often as possible when she is with the infant and express her breast milk when they are apart so that another caregiver can feed it to the baby in a clean and safe way."

The benefits are also obvious for employers, she added. "Creating a breastfeeding-friendly work environment reduces the risk of absenteeism, reduces health claims to employers and increases retention of female employees," Davies said. "Basic accommodations such as reasonable time and a clean, private space for breastfeeding offer a 2:1 return on investment. More comprehensive accommodations, like supportive policies, lactation consultants, providing breast pumps, flexible schedules and on-site childcare offer a 3:1 investment for employers."

Davies offers free consultations with employers to develop policies and environmental supports such as those described above. Recent healthcare reform legislation includes several sections boosting support for nursing mothers, so new information is available and the laws are already in effect. "The law was effective immediately, however the Department of Labor will give employers time to comply once the rules take effect. While the DOL works to define terms and processes for enforcement of the law, Davies said PPHD is ready to support employers and breastfeeding employees with tools, information and resources.

Mother-child separation due to work presents a serious challenge to meeting breastfeeding goals when employers do not meet the relatively simple needs of breastfeeding employees. Women now make up half the U.S. workforce, Davies concluded, and are the primary breadwinner in nearly four of 10 American families. Returning to an unsupportive work environment has been identified as a major reason for avoidance or early abandonment of breastfeeding. "Workplace support can bridge this gap and help more women to balance working and breastfeeding," Davies said.

For additional information about breastfeeding and worksite wellness visit www.pphd.org. The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.