



SUPPORTING NURSING MOMS AT WORK

SOLUTIONS FOR MANUFACTURING

A FACT SHEET FROM THE OFFICE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

Supporting nursing women can work, even in large manufacturing plants with unique work conditions. A wide variety of large and small companies have found creative solutions to give employees time and space to express milk at work. These solutions can be inexpensive and easy to put into place. They are also highly valued by employees and help improve employee productivity and morale.

Bottom-Line Benefits to Business

Support for employees who are nursing their children is a valued employee benefit. It is also good for the company's bottom line, yielding a **3 to 1 Return on Investment**¹ due to:

- ▶ Lower absenteeism rates of both mothers and fathers (since breastfed babies are healthier)²

- ▶ Higher retention rates (94% among employers who support nursing moms vs. national average of 59%)³
- ▶ Lower health care costs and insurance claims when infants are breastfed⁴
- ▶ Higher productivity and loyalty among workers⁵

ACA Requirements

Section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act has been amended to provide for basic accommodations for nursing women during the work period, including:

- ▶ Reasonable time to express milk during the work day
- ▶ Private space that is not a bathroom

The law applies to businesses of all sizes, and creative solutions abound. Learn more at the U.S. Department of Labor at www.dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers.



Simple Space Solutions

Nursing women require a private area to express milk. In a large manufacturing plant, multiple spaces in each building might be needed if there are many female employees. Estimate at least one private space or station per 1,000 female employees.⁶ This will help reduce the amount of break time moms need to walk to the space. Some companies provide multi-user spaces to accommodate more than one employee at the same time. Partitions and curtains can



help provide individual privacy for each mother within the space. Options for space include:

- ▶ Converted office space
- ▶ Converted storage areas or “rest” areas
- ▶ On-site clinic
- ▶ Partitions or curtains to create several private “stations” within a larger lactation room
- ▶ Constructing small spaces in quieter areas of the plant

The space must be functional for milk expression. Space must provide a chair and a flat surface



for the breast pump. Privacy must also be ensured. Options include a locked door or signage and a well-communicated policy. An electrical outlet and nearby access to running water also helps reduce the amount of time the employee needs to express milk.

Time Solutions

Most women use their usual breaks and meal periods at work to express milk. Creative scheduling often helps adjust for employee breaks. Many companies use floater staff to provide coverage when a worker must be away from

her work station. The time needed to express milk is around 15-20 minutes per session, depending on the distance between the employee’s work station and the private space.

Storing Expressed Milk

Human milk can be stored in a variety of ways, including a small refrigerator in the milk expression room. Some employees prefer to use their own personal cooler or insulated lunch bag to keep the milk with them. Some companies provide lockers for women to secure their cooler bags and breast pumps.

Other Considerations

A written policy helps assure that all levels of staff have equal access to support, and that the needs of nursing moms will be respected. Include benefits of the company’s support as part of new employee orientation so all employees will be aware of the company’s policy. Many large companies include information about the legal requirements and practical solutions in their supervisory training.

Learn More!

Manufacturing firms across the country have found many other creative solutions for supporting nursing women at work. To learn more, check the online searchable resource, *Supporting Nursing Moms at Work: Employer Solutions* at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, Office on Women’s Health at www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding-at-work.

¹Washington Business Group on Health. Breastfeeding support at the workplace. Washington, D.C.; 2000. Issue No. 2.

²Cohen R, Martek MB, Mrtek RG. Comparison of maternal absenteeism and infant illness rates among breastfeeding and formula-feeding women in two corporations. *Am J of Health Prom*; 1995. 10(2):148-153.

³Ortiz J, et al. Duration of breast milk expression among working mothers enrolled in an employer-sponsored lactation program. *Ped Nursing*; 2004. 30(2):111-119.

⁴Mutual of Omaha. Prenatal and lactation education reduces newborn health care costs. Omaha, NE: Mutual of Omaha; 2001.

⁵Galtry J. Lactation and the labor market: breastfeeding, labor market changes, and public policy in the United States. *Health Care Women Int*; 1997. 18:467-480.

⁶Based on a formula derived by the National Institutes of Health. Described at the HHS Office on Women’s Health *Supporting Nursing Moms at Work: Employer Solutions* at www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding-at-work.