

## *White House Council on Women and Girls*

### Obama Administration Actions to Support Women Who Choose to Breastfeed

December 20, 2010

*A workplace that facilitates women in their roles as workers and mothers not only contributes to the health of children and families, but is imperative for the overall health and security of the American economy. We are proud to support mothers who make the decision to breastfeed and we need to do all that we can to support them.*

—Valerie Jarrett, Senior Advisor to President Obama  
and Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls

#### Background

Breastfeeding is one of the most effective preventive measures mothers can take to protect their children's and their own health. Breastfeeding helps reduce children's risk for acute and chronic diseases like ear infections, asthma, obesity, and type 2 diabetes, rare but serious diseases like childhood leukemia, and even sudden infant death syndrome, thanks to antibodies, cells, and immunologic components uniquely available in mothers' milk. Breastfeeding also protects nursing mothers against diseases like type 2 diabetes and breast and ovarian cancers.

A study published earlier this year in *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, found that nearly 1,000 deaths among U.S. infants could be prevented if 90 percent of mothers breastfed exclusively for 6 months, and that this would also save our nation \$13 billion each year. Individual families see savings from breastfeeding as well, since one year of formula and feeding supplies can cost well over \$1500.

Despite the significant health benefits and cost savings, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that while most babies (75%) are initially breastfed, only 43% are still breastfeeding at 6 months, and less than one quarter (23%) are breastfed for at least 12 months. (State-by-state breakdowns are available from the CDC at [www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm).)

A major reason why women stop breastfeeding earlier than is recommended by health professionals is that they are returning to workplaces that do not offer break time or a private space to express milk. Yet studies have shown that supporting nursing mothers on the job can be a win-win for businesses and working women, because employers benefit from a combination of lower health care costs, employees taking less sick time, and the ability to retain experienced women as employees.

#### Actions by the Administration

The Obama Administration has taken steps to support women who decide to breastfeed their children. They include:

1. Supporting nursing women in the workplace. The Affordable Care Act signed into law by President Obama on March 23, 2010 requires employers to provide nursing mothers with reasonable break time and a place other than a bathroom that is shielded from view and free from intrusion to express breast milk at work, up until a child's first birthday. The Wage and Hour Division at the Department of Labor is responsible for implementing this new requirement, which took effect upon enactment.

Today, the Department is releasing a new Frequently Asked Questions document that provides basic information to employers about how to comply with the new law, as well as a Request for Information that invites public comment on certain aspects of the agency's interpretation of the law.

While this provision of the Affordable Care Act applies only to those workers who are covered by the Section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which sets forth overtime pay requirements for hourly workers, the Department is encouraging employers to provide breaks to all nursing mothers, including professional women.

Further information is available from the Department at [www.dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers](http://www.dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers).

2. Ensuring that federal agencies are leaders in supporting nursing mothers. As the nation's largest employer, the federal government strives to be a leader in advancing workforce policies that promote the well-being and productivity of American workers and their families. The President today is delegating authority to the Director of the Office of Personnel Management to address the issue of reasonable break times and private space for all nursing mothers in the federal civilian workforce, including those not covered by the Affordable Care Act.
3. A new online resource that provides information for women who make the decision to breastfeed, their employers, and their health providers.

This new resource is available at: <http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/breastfeeding.html>.

In addition, the child nutrition bill signed into law on December 13 strengthens the role of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in supporting breastfeeding. Through WIC, which serves more than two million women, breastfeeding mothers can access breastfeeding counseling and educational materials, peer counselor support, breast pumps, and other supplies.

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