

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." Davies is also the coordinator for the Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council.

The wellness council provides free tools and consultation for members, training and networking opportunities and ready-to-use services such as employee newsletters and bulletins, screening, testing and welcome kits, resource lists, podcasts and customizable policies and behavior change programs, updated monthly.

The benefits to helping breastfeeding mothers 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. "According to the National Business Group on Health, 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 and flexible schedules offer a 3:1 investment for employers."

Davies offers free consultations with employers to develop policies and environmental supports such as those described above. 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 last year, Davies said, 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. "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, Davies added. Women now make up half the U.S. workforce, she 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 how your organization can become a Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council member, visit www.pphd.org/pwwc. 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.