

BREASTFEEDING

Carver County Receives Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace Recognition

This spring, Carver County government became the first employer in Carver County to be recognized as a Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace by the Minnesota Department of Health. The Carver County Board of Commissioners first enacted a Lactation Support Policy in 2015. Much work has recently taken place to ensure all employees are supported in their infant feeding choices.

In the past year, with support from the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), additional lactation spaces have been added to several county buildings and worksites. If there was not room for a dedicated space, a portable lactation kit was made available to employees for use in an unused office or conference room. These kits include a door lock, so any room can be outfitted to accommodate a nursing mother. Portable car lactation kits were created for staff who spend time working in the community (e.g., home visits, highway, etc.).

In addition to ensuring all employees have access to a private space to express breast milk, Carver County has a new parent library, which contains variety of breastfeeding and parenting resources available for employee checkout. Additionally, the Employee Relations Division offers a breastfeeding resource bag to all employees requesting FMLA leave for the birth of a child. The breastfeeding resource bag is filled with free samples of breastfeeding support materials (e.g., nursing pads, breastmilk storage bags) and additional information and resources related to breastfeeding, returning to work, and infant health and care. Also included in this bag is *The Daddy Book*, which is a booklet published by the Minnesota Fathers & Families Network that provides infant and child development information, while supporting a strong positive relationship between new dads and their babies.

An expectant mother's supervisor also receives additional communications, encouraging the provision of a supportive and family-friendly work environment. Information is given about the benefits of breastfeeding and the wide variety of milk expression and time-needs that a new mother may experience upon her return to work. Supervisors are asked to provide schedule and break time flexibility, and are directed to a number of additional breastfeeding resources.

While breastfeeding rates are increasing in the U.S., there are still too many families unable to meet their breastfeeding goals for a variety of reasons. Individual workplaces providing environments conducive to breastfeeding is one important step in advancing this essential priority in improving public health. In addition to the number of important maternal and infant benefits that breastfeeding provides, support of breastfeeding among families also has substantial organizational benefits in areas of employee recruitment and retention, health care and organizational cost savings, and community leadership.

Carver County encourages workplaces throughout the county and the state of Minnesota to join them in taking steps to increase the number of families who are successfully able to meet their breastfeeding goals, especially when it comes to longevity and exclusivity. Please contact Danielle Griesmer, Carver County Health & Wellness Program Manager, at dgriesmer@co.carver.mn.us with any questions regarding Carver County's lactation support activities.

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