

# Supportive Workplace Policies Critical for Nursing Mothers

FACT SHEET

January 2011

Every year roughly four million women give birth in the United States,<sup>1</sup> and more than 75 percent of them choose to breastfeed.<sup>2</sup> But with two-thirds of today's working women returning to work within three months of giving birth,<sup>3</sup> a lack of supportive workplace policies and laws is forcing too many nursing mothers to quit breastfeeding (or never start). Study after study has shown the value of breastfeeding in protecting both mothers and children from a number of acute and chronic diseases and conditions. **It is time for our nation's workplace policies—and our laws—to eliminate the barriers that keep many working mothers from breastfeeding.**

## Workplace Supports Make a Significant Difference for Nursing Mothers

New mothers need time away from work after childbirth, and those who choose to breastfeed need break time and a private space to express milk when they return to work. But too many working women still lack these basic rights. Fortunately, evidence of the value of workplace policies that support new mothers is growing, and state and federal action is paving the way for the supportive standards working mothers need.

- **Workplace policies that support nursing mothers positively impact a woman's decision to breastfeed.** Research shows that employer support—including breastfeeding education, counseling, private lactation rooms, and breast pumps—make a tremendous difference in a woman's ability to breastfeed. According to one study, such supports helped as many as 98 percent of working mothers start breastfeeding, and 58 percent continued for six months or longer.<sup>4</sup> There is no question that these policies work.
- **Federal legislation now recognizes the need to protect nursing mothers in the workplace.** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 included a vital provision that helps working mothers who choose to breastfeed. The law grants hourly workers the right to reasonable break time and a private place to express breast milk at work. This is the first national workplace standard on this issue, and builds on the rights that several states have already established. By ensuring a time and place to express milk, the ACA is expected to increase the number of mothers who breastfeed by 165,000 every year.<sup>5</sup>
- **Paid family leave policies are proven to provide critical support to new mothers who choose to breastfeed.** According to a 2011 study, new mothers in low-quality jobs who took advantage of California's paid family leave program were 11 percent more likely to start breastfeeding than those who did not—and use of the leave doubled the length of time that the average woman spent breastfeeding.<sup>6</sup> Paid leave standards can go a long way to ensure a new mother can get the immediate support she needs to promote good health for her and her new child.

## Private Employers, State and Local Governments Must Step Up

**All employers should take basic steps to protect the health of nursing mothers and their children.** The federal government is leading the way by directing federal agencies to extend the right to express milk at work to all new mothers—not just those covered by overtime laws—but all nursing mothers who work in the private sector should have this right as well.

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**State and local governments can take a key step to support new parents by establishing paid family leave standards.** California's paid family leave program has proven that paid leave is beneficial to a nursing mother's ability to start and continue breastfeeding. Both California and New Jersey have established programs that provide paid leave to care for a new child. The absence of such programs in other states leaves 88 percent of private-sector workers without access to paid family leave.<sup>7</sup>

**The National Partnership for Women & Families is working with policymakers and advocates around the country to advance workplace policies that help all working mothers and caregivers meet the dual demands of work and family.**

Learn more at [www.nationalpartnership.org](http://www.nationalpartnership.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *FastStats: Births and Natality*. Retrieved 19 January 2011, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/births.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Breastfeeding Report Card, United States: Outcome Indicators*. Retrieved 19 January 2011, from <http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard2.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Wen-Jui, H., et al. (2008, June). The Timing of Mothers' Employment after Childbirth. *Monthly Labor Review*, 15-27. Retrieved 18 January 2011, from <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2008/06/art2full.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Drago, R., Hayes, J., & Yi, Y. (2010). *Better Health for Mothers and Children: Breastfeeding Accommodations under the Affordable Care Act*. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 18 January 2011, from <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B292.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Appelbaum, E., & Milkman, R. (2011, January). *Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*. Retrieved 18 January 2011, from <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, March). *Employee Benefits in the United States National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2010 (Table 32)*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2010/ebbl0046.pdf>

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*The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [www.nationalpartnership.org](http://www.nationalpartnership.org).*