

How Public Health Professionals Can Help

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding

Across the United States, most new mothers hope to breastfeed. Breastfeeding protects the health of babies and their mothers. Leading health organizations* agree that most babies should have only breast milk for the first 6 months of life and should be breastfed for at least 12 months. With support from their families and communities, as well as from public health professionals, mothers are more likely to be able to breastfeed their babies.

How You Can Help Mothers Breastfeed

Set up programs for new fathers and grandmothers.

New mothers rely on their partners and their own mothers for help and advice on how to feed their babies. Family members need up-to-date information so they can help mothers make decisions about breastfeeding. They may not know that breastfeeding can protect both mothers and their babies from some health risks.

Work to ensure support for breastfeeding in the hospital.

For women who want to breastfeed, the support they get—or do not get—can make the difference. As a public health professional, you can work with hospital leaders to improve their policies and practices and make it easier for mothers to breastfeed.

Strengthen mother-to-mother support.

Talking with other women who are breastfeeding can help mothers decide to start and keep breastfeeding. You can work with hospitals and community health groups to connect breastfeeding mothers with each other.

Help mothers get support after they leave the hospital.

Without help, some new mothers may stop breastfeeding. Set up statewide networks for newborn care. Encourage partnerships between hospitals and health care providers so that mothers can find needed follow-up care, including breastfeeding support.

Work with community groups to support breastfeeding.

As a public health professional, you can work with nonprofit community service organizations, early childhood education programs, peer support organizations, and health care clinics to help mothers in your community have an easier time with breastfeeding.

Help employers set up lactation support programs that work.

Public health professionals can help employers make it easier for women to keep breastfeeding their babies when they go back to work. You can help employers apply the federal law that requires employers to give mothers time and a private place to express breast milk. For ideas and information, see the resource kit, *The Business Case for Breastfeeding: Steps for Creating a Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite*.[†]

* Includes the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Nurse-Midwives, American Dietetic Association, and American Public Health Association.

[†] Available at www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/government-in-action/business-case-for-breastfeeding.



How You Can Take Action

- Make sure communities and hospitals support and help mothers who want to breastfeed. As a public health professional, you can be part of national efforts to support breastfeeding.
- Promote changes to health care systems that make it easier for women to start and keep breastfeeding.
- Support efforts to teach mothers and their families about the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Take part in writing health care standards, putting policies in place, and displaying leadership that supports breastfeeding.
- Look at the selected actions recommended by the Surgeon General (see next page) to make support for breastfeeding part of programs serving mothers and babies in your community.



From the Surgeon General

Selected Actions for Public Health Professionals to Support Breastfeeding

Programs for Families

Action 2. Develop programs to educate fathers and grandmothers about breastfeeding.

- Launch or establish campaigns for breastfeeding education that target a mother's primary support network, including fathers and grandmothers.
- Offer classes on breastfeeding that are convenient for family members to attend.

Mother-to-Mother Support

Action 3. Strengthen programs that provide mother-to-mother support and peer counseling.

- Create and maintain a sustainable infrastructure for mother-to-mother support groups and for peer counseling programs in hospitals and community health care settings.
- Establish peer counseling as a core service available to all women in WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children).

Community-Based Organizations

Action 4. Use community-based organizations to promote and support breastfeeding.

- Support and fund small nonprofit organizations that promote breastfeeding in communities of color.
- Integrate education and support for breastfeeding into public health programs that serve new families.
- Ensure around-the-clock access to resources that provide assistance with breastfeeding.

Maternity Care

Action 7. Ensure that maternity care practices throughout the United States are fully supportive of breastfeeding.

- Accelerate implementation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.
- Establish transparent, accountable public reporting of maternity care practices in the United States.
- Establish a new advanced certification program for perinatal patient care.
- Establish systems to control the distribution of infant formula in hospitals and ambulatory care facilities.



Care from Hospital to Community

Action 8. Develop systems to guarantee continuity of skilled support for lactation between hospitals and health care settings in the community.

- Create comprehensive statewide networks for home- or clinic-based follow-up care to be provided to every newborn in the state.
- Establish partnerships for integrated and continuous follow-up care after discharge from the hospital.
- Establish and implement policies and programs to ensure that participants in WIC have services in place.

Lactation Support at Workplaces

Action 14. Ensure that employers establish and maintain comprehensive, high-quality lactation support programs for their employees.

- Develop resources to help employers comply with federal law that requires employers to provide the time and a place for nursing mothers to express breast milk.
- Design and disseminate materials to educate employers about the benefits of providing more comprehensive, high-quality support for breastfeeding employees.
- Develop and share innovative solutions to the obstacles to breastfeeding that women face when returning to work in non-office settings.
- Promote comprehensive, high-quality lactation support programs as part of a basic employee benefits package.