

# The Surgeon General's

## Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding

### FACT SHEET

*The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding outlines steps that can be taken to remove some of the obstacles faced by women who want to breastfeed their babies.*

### How many American women breastfeed their babies?

- Three out of four mothers (75%) in the U.S. start out breastfeeding, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2010 Breastfeeding Report Card.
- At the end of six months, breastfeeding rates fall to 43%, and only 13% of babies are exclusively breastfed.
- Among African-American babies, the rates are significantly lower, 58% start out breastfeeding, and 28% breastfeed at six months, with 8% exclusively breastfed at six months.
- The Healthy People 2020 objectives for breastfeeding are: 82% ever breastfed, 61% at 6 months, and 34% at 1 year.

### What are the health benefits of breastfeeding?

- Breastfeeding protects babies from infections and illnesses that include diarrhea, ear infections and pneumonia.
- Breastfed babies are less likely to develop asthma.
- Children who are breastfed for six months are less likely to become obese.
- Breastfeeding also reduces the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Mothers who breastfeed have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

### What are the economic benefits of breastfeeding?

- Families who follow optimal breastfeeding practices can save between \$1,200–\$1,500 in expenditures on infant formula in the first year alone.
- A study published last year in the journal *Pediatrics* estimated that if 90% of U.S. families followed guidelines to breastfeed exclusively for six months, the U.S. would annually save \$13 billion from reduced medical and other costs.
- For both employers and employees, better infant health means fewer health insurance claims, less employee time off to care for sick children, and higher productivity.
- Mutual of Omaha found that health care costs for newborns are three times lower for babies whose mothers participate in the company's employee maternity and lactation program.

### What obstacles do mothers encounter when they attempt to breastfeed?

- Lack of experience or understanding among family members of how best to support mothers and babies.
- Not enough opportunities to communicate with other breastfeeding mothers.
- Lack of up-to-date instruction and information from health care professionals.
- Hospital practices that make it hard to get started with successful breastfeeding.
- Lack of accommodation to breastfeed or express milk at the workplace.

### **What can the health care community do?**

- More hospitals can incorporate the recommendations of UNICEF/WHO's Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.
- Provide breastfeeding education for health clinicians who care for women and children.
- Ensure access to International Board Certified Lactation Consultants.

### **What can employers do?**

- Start and maintain high-quality lactation support programs for employees.
- Provide clean places for mothers to breastfeed.
- Work toward establishing paid maternity leave for employed mothers.

### **What can community leaders do?**

- Strengthen programs that provide mother-to-mother support and peer counseling.
- Use community organizations to promote and support breastfeeding.

### **What can families and friends of mothers do?**

- Give mothers the support and encouragement they need to breastfeed.
- Take advantage of programs to educate fathers and grandmothers about breastfeeding.

### **What can policymakers do?**

- Support small nonprofit organizations that promote breastfeeding in African-American communities.
- Support compliance with the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*.
- Increase funding of high-quality research on breastfeeding.
- Support better tracking of breastfeeding rates as well as factors that affect breastfeeding.

To order a printed copy of *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding*, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or email [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov) and reference the publication title. For a downloadable copy, visit [www.surgeongeneral.gov](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov).

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