

Supporting Breast/Chestfeeding in Los Angeles County

Breast/chestfeeding reduces the risks of both acute and chronic health conditions for infants as well as lactating parents¹. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends approximately six months of exclusive nursing, with continued breast/chestfeeding while introducing complimentary foods for two years or beyond, or as long as is mutually desired by the lactating parent and child. Given the importance of infant nutrition, the AAP has proclaimed breast/chestfeeding a public health issue and not simply a lifestyle choice.

Exclusivity and duration of nursing are key factors in improving infant and childhood health. Babies who exclusively receive human milk for the first six months of life have better long-term health outcomes, with lowered risk for lower respiratory tract infections, severe diarrhea, otitis media, childhood obesity, diabetes, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Successful breast/chestfeeding can also have a positive effect

¹ A note about terminology: BreastfeedLA uses the terms "breastfeeding" and "chestfeeding" interchangeably to describe the action of feeding an infant human-milk. The term "chestfeeding" is intentionally offered as an alternate term for lactating persons that prefer not to use the term "breast" when referring to their own bodies.

MOTION

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on the mental well-being of both the lactating parent and child.

High initiation rates show that most lactating parents in the United States want to breast/chestfeed and start out doing so, yet the overall rates for the duration of breast/chestfeeding are very low. Despite the recommendation to nurse exclusively for six months, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Immunization Survey (NIS) data shows less than 47% of infants were exclusively nursed until the age of three months and about 25% were exclusively nursed until the age of six months. Disparities between racial/ethnic groups are large. Systemic racism, uneven parental leave policies, and inequitable access to lactation support play significant roles in making the six-month goal even harder to attain for lactating parents of color. According to the California Department of Public Health, 2020-2022 Los Angeles County (County) in-hospital data shows that 57% of Black babies, 58% of Hispanic babies, 60% of Asian babies, 64% of Pacific Islander babies, and 69% of American Indian/Alaska Native babies are exclusively breast/chestfed compared to 77% of White babies.

According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), supportive lactation policies can lead to increased duration of breast/chestfeeding among lactating parents, which is beneficial for the health of both the infant and parent. Creating a supportive environment for lactating employees is crucial for fostering a healthy and inclusive workplace. Providing support through dedicated lactation spaces and adequate break times is essential in helping lactating employees balance their work and parental responsibilities, thereby reducing stress and enhancing their overall wellbeing. It not only aids in the physical and emotional health of employees but also contributes to a more engaged and productive workforce.

The Los Angeles County Departments of Public Health (DPH) and Health Services (DHS) support breast/chestfeeding through the Division of Maternal Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) programs and County maternity hospitals. MCAH programs include home visits and doulas who provide lactation counseling to individual clients; lactation support services through public health nurses and staff; referrals to existing Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant and Children (WIC) and other providers; and coordination with community-based organizations. DPH conducted a social media promotion and community engagement campaign during the month of August 2023, which was proclaimed as National Breastfeeding Month by the Board of Supervisors. The Public Health Regional Health Offices support the Regional Breastfeeding Consortium by coordinating with BreastfeedLA, the Perinatal Advisory Council: Leadership, Advocacy and Consultation, WIC, and other partners to convene maternity hospitals in an ongoing conversation about expanding and improving the quality of lactation services. Additionally, DPH has hired a Breastfeeding Coordinator to support education, training, and access to resources in health clinics and hospitals, community-based organizations, and County departments.

Current efforts to support breast/chestfeeding within DHS include: “Baby Friendly” certified maternity facilities; 1:1 virtual pre-natal education; outreach to enroll patients in group or 1:1 education classes; 1:1 postpartum education in clinic or via phone; communications campaigns on the benefits of human milk. DHS empaneled patients who are having trouble with lactation, or need additional support, are connected to a public health nurse, the hospital lactation department, or WIC. Additionally, support for lactating parents in the Central Regional Detention Facility is provided by clinical providers.

As the County continues to build upon existing lactation resources that improve accessibility regardless of a person's location or income, it is critical to increase awareness of services that are available. Allocating funding towards lactation initiatives and resources allows the County to address the systems and structures that lead to infant feeding inequities, advocate for breast/chestfeeding in all initiatives, and help connect and inform the collaborative interagency and community increasing accessibility. By recognizing and dedicating a month to breast/chestfeeding awareness, we can foster a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers parents to make informed choices. This motion aligns with our shared commitment to improving the health and well-being of parents and their children across the County of Los Angeles.

~~I WE, THEREFORE, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS~~ that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Proclaim the month of August 2024 as National Breastfeeding Month, the week of August 1-7, 2024 as World Breastfeeding Week, the week of August 8–14, 2024 as Indigenous Milk Medicine Week, the week of August 15-21, 2024 as Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Breastfeeding Week, the week of August 25-31, 2024 as Black Breastfeeding Week, the week of September 1-7, 2024 as Workplace Lactation Week, and the week of September 3-9, 2024 as Semana de la Lactancia Latina Week with the goals of advancing breast/chestfeeding as part of good nutrition, health protection, food security, and poverty reduction;
2. Direct the Department of Public Health, the Department of Health Services, and other relevant County departments to ~~implement feasible County and public~~

continue existing educational activities in collaboration with community partners that promote the value and importance of breast/chestfeeding, including for those with developmental and physical disabilities as well as recommended strategies for those who require medications to manage conditions;

3. Encourage all County departments, especially managers and supervisors, to actively foster and maintain environments that support the needs of lactating parents. This includes the availability of appropriate spaces and break times dedicated to lactation. Furthermore, all departments must collaborate with the Department of Human Resources' Countywide Lactation Program to ensure that every County facility, whether owned or leased, is fully compliant with the existing County policy; and
4. Encourage all County Department Heads, Chief Deputies, Administrative Deputies, and Departmental Human Resources Managers to attend the Department of Human Resource's 2024 Countywide Lactation Program Forum in August 2024 to learn more about their obligations under County policy and state law.

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