

Public Acceptance

Definition

Interventions to increase public acceptance of breastfeeding include legislation ensuring the right to breastfeed; programs to improve acceptance of breastfeeding in public places such as restaurants, stores, and libraries; the placement of nursing mothers' lounges in public areas; interventions aimed at child care facilities that care for breastfed infants and children; and the inclusion of breastfeeding in various curricula aimed at school-aged children.



Photo by David C. Arendt, courtesy of La Leche League International

Rationale

Normative health beliefs are heavily influenced by one's environment.⁶³ Currently, many Americans have had little experience with breastfeeding in their daily lives. Many misconceptions related to breastfeeding persist,⁶⁴ in part because it remains unseen and mysterious. Many mothers feel uncomfortable breastfeeding away from home.⁶⁵ Anecdotal reports indicate that women throughout the United States have inappropriately been requested to leave various locations because they are feeding their infants. Mothers cite negative experiences when requesting child care providers to use breast-milk as a barrier to continued breastfeeding.

As breastfeeding becomes more accepted as the normal and standard infant feeding method, public acceptance should increase. Increasing the number of people who see breastfeeding as normal can be achieved by increasing the public's acceptance of breastfeeding.

Evidence of Effectiveness

While increasing the public's acceptance of breastfeeding can be beneficial in many ways, and many efforts exist to try and increase public acceptance of breastfeeding, a **Cochrane review**³ found no scientific studies of interventions to increase this acceptance, making it impossible to determine whether they are effective.



Description and Characteristics

Both federal and state laws have been enacted that specifically allow women to breastfeed in any place they are otherwise legally allowed to be. Legislation in some states exempts from jury duty mothers who are breastfeeding. As of May 2004, the federal government and 34 states had enacted legislation on breastfeeding.

Several states and breastfeeding coalitions have established Breastfeeding Welcome Here materials for distribution to restaurants, stores, and other public locations. These materials generally include basic information for merchants and staff on supporting customers who breastfeed as well as items for public display, such as window stickers and table tents (print materials on tables generally found in restaurants).



Photo by David C. Arendt, courtesy of La Leche League International

Many public places, such as malls, airports, zoos, hospitals, libraries, and museums, have established areas for breastfeeding known commonly as nursing mothers' lounges. These rooms are typically set away from high-traffic areas and often have comfortable seating and lighting, a few toys for children, and reading material for mothers. The lounges are distinct and detached from public restrooms.

Also, some child care facilities offer specific training for staff regarding the appropriate handling of human milk and working with breastfeeding mothers to establish the most appropriate and supportive care of their children. Some child care facilities actively solicit families with breastfeeding infants and children and use many of the same materials as those employed by restaurants and stores to indicate their support of breastfeeding.

In addition, schools have integrated education on breastfeeding into a wide variety of disciplines. Breastfeeding can be effectively and appropriately explored across the grades with age-appropriate examples and images. Effective approaches involve incorporating breastfeeding into larger academic disciplines, such as biology, psychology, nutrition, and art, rather than addressing it as a stand-alone theme.

Program Examples

Legislation

California has four major pieces of legislation directly related to breastfeeding. Two of these (the 1998 *Breastfeeding at Work* law and the 2002 *Lactation Accommodation* legislation) were described in an earlier section (Support for Breastfeeding in the Workplace). The 1997 *Personal Rights: Breastfeeding* law states that a mother may breastfeed her child in any location where the mother and child are authorized to be present. The 2000 *Jury Service: Breastfeeding* provision exempts breastfeeding mothers from jury duty and requires the state not to make the mother appear in court to present her request.

Support of Breastfeeding by Merchants and Other Businesses

The San Diego County Breastfeeding Coalition has a *Breastfeeding Welcome Here* program in which merchants and other businesses may order window stickers with a graphic of a **breastfeeding dyad** and the words “Breastfeeding Welcome Here” along with information about supporting their customers who breastfeed.

Child Care Facilities

The Mississippi Department of Health WIC program has developed a training curriculum for child care providers entitled *How to Support a Breastfeeding Mother: A Guide for the Childcare Center*. The curriculum incorporates guidelines for providers on how to support breastfeeding mothers as well as guidelines for the storage and handling of expressed milk. This curriculum has been adopted by other state health departments across the United States. The curriculum and teaching materials are all available free for download from the Texas Department of Health (<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/bf/handoutstext.shtm>).



Academic Curricula

The state of New York has developed a comprehensive curriculum to incorporate education on breastfeeding that is relevant to the entire K–12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) age span that includes lesson plans, suggested reading, and activities. This curriculum uses multifaceted content areas to teach the normalcy of breastfeeding in age-appropriate contexts, including breastfeeding as one of the defining characteristics of all mammals and concepts of general biology, immunology, sociology, economics, and environmental waste. The curriculum is intended to be fully integrated into existing academic areas and not taught as a stand-alone academic subject. The full curriculum is available online (see Resources).

Resources

50 State Summary of Breastfeeding Laws:
<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/breast50.htm>

San Diego County Breastfeeding Coalition
Breastfeeding Welcome Here program:
<http://www.breastfeeding.org/newsletter/v2i1/page6.html>

Motherwear Breastfeeding Welcome Here Campaign:
http://motherwear.com/Services/community/outreach/main_gate.asp?Page=2&uid

Mississippi WIC How to Support a Breastfeeding
Mother: A Guide for the Childcare Center
<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/bf/handoutstext.shtm>

The United States Breastfeeding Committee:
Breastfeeding and Childcare
<http://usbreastfeeding.org/Issue-Papers/Childcare.pdf>

New York State Department of Health Breastfeeding
Education Activity Package for Grades K–12:
http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/b_feed

Potential Action Steps

- Identify a state legislator who is supportive of breastfeeding and ask him or her to sponsor quality legislation.
- Contact the managers of local shopping malls that do not have nursing mothers' lounges; encourage and help them to make appropriate accommodations for their patrons.
- Work with state boards that license child care facilities to distribute guidelines for supporting breastfeeding in these settings.
- Recognize companies and noncommercial enterprises that support mothers who breastfeed with publicity and other incentives. Potential recipients include restaurants; businesses (e.g., stores, hair salons); tenants of shopping malls; state, city, and county governments; libraries; zoos, swimming pools, and other recreational facilities; and fitness centers.