

Supporting Breastfeeding Families in Early Care and Education (ECE) Programs



The Dietary Guidelines for Americans for 2025–2030 recommends that:

- Infants are exclusively breastfed for about the first 6 months of life.
- Infants continue breastfeeding along with starting appropriate solid foods at about 6 months of age.
- Infants continue breastfeeding for 2 years or longer.

Despite this recommendation, fewer than 1 in 3 infants is exclusively breastfed as recommended by the time they are 6 months old.

Breastfeeding has benefits for mothers and infants

Benefits for the Mother

- Lower risk for breast and ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure

Benefits for the Infant

- Lower risk for ear infections, gastrointestinal infections (diarrhea/ vomiting), asthma, type 1 diabetes, obesity, childhood leukemia, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Best source of nutrition for most babies

Storing breast milk at your facility

Breast milk is not a biohazard and does not require special handling. Expressed milk is a food and may be stored alongside other foods in any refrigerator that is appropriate for food storage. Make sure that breast milk is labeled with names and dates according to your ECE program's policy and wash your hands before preparing breast milk to avoid contamination.

Federal reimbursement for serving breast milk to children older than 12 months

If your program participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), serving breast milk is reimbursable at any age (similar to cow's milk after 1 year). Breast milk is an acceptable substitute for all or part of the milk requirement in the CACFP meal pattern. If a mother breastfeeds her child onsite, this is also reimbursable.



How your facility can support breastfeeding moms

When mothers return to work or school and their child is in someone else's care, they may face barriers to continuing to provide their child breast milk. Here are some ways your ECE program can support mothers in reaching their breastfeeding goals:



- Be a cheerleader for parents and program staff who are trying to breastfeed.
- Establish procedures for storing and handling breast milk and for feeding breastfed infants.
- Post your breastfeeding policies onsite in visible spaces. You can find a sample policy in the Resources section.
- Train all staff on your facility's breastfeeding policies.
- Include breastfeeding-positive messaging and images in your resources and communications.
- Tell families about your program's breastfeeding policies when they tour your facility. When families provide breast milk in addition to other milk products, serve breast milk first.
- Share information with families on local lactation resources such as support groups and government support programs like USDA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).
- Welcome mothers to breastfeed onsite at any time. Create a comfortable, private space for breastfeeding or pumping. This could include a door, curtain, or furniture to serve as a privacy barrier; a relaxing chair or sofa; access to water or hand hygiene; and an electrical outlet and small table for pump and bottle supplies. Make sure mothers also feel welcome to breastfeed in the classroom.
- See if your state has an ECE Breastfeeding Recognition Program or offers professional development trainings on breastfeeding for your staff.
- Support your ECE staff who are breastfeeding or pumping by including them in your program's breastfeeding policies.
- Communicate with parents/guardians to establish a plan for children receiving breast milk during emergencies or natural disasters when a parent might not be reachable.

Resources

- [Better Kid Care Professional Development Trainings](#)
- [Ten Steps for Breastfeeding-friendly Child Care](#)
- [Storage, Handling, and Preparation of Breast Milk in Early Care and Education \(ECE\) Programs](#)
- [Child and Adult Care Food Program Handbook](#)
- [Sample ECE policy for breastfeeding](#)
- If your state has a license for [Go NAP SACC](#), your ECE program may have access to trainings and technical support to help create a supportive breastfeeding environment for children in your care.