



Establish Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace

The Employer's Guide



Department of Health



Online version

Combine Breastfeeding and Work

Breastfeeding confers many benefits. Breastmilk is nutritious and contains a variety of antibodies and immune cells for diseases prevention. It brings far more health benefits to infants and young children than formula milk does. Breastfeeding also helps mothers reduce their risks of breast cancer and ovarian cancer. As recommended by the World Health Organisation, babies should be exclusively breastfed in the first 6 months. Solid food should be introduced gradually at around 6 months old to cater for their nutritional needs. Continue to breastfeed up to 2 years old or beyond.

With the enhanced public education and the implementation of a series of supportive measures by the Department of Health, there has been an increased knowledge of breastmilk among Hong Kong families. The local breastfeeding situation has been gradually improved. However, quite a number of mothers comment that sustaining breastfeeding at work is difficult even if they want to¹. As revealed by a survey from the Department of Health, around one third of the interviewed mothers indicated that “returning to workplace” was their reason to stop breastfeeding².



1. Tarrant M, Dodgson JE, Tsang SF: Initiating and sustaining breastfeeding in Hong Kong: contextual influences on new mothers' experiences. *Nurs Health Sci* 2002, 4(4):189-199.
2. A Survey of Young Child Feeding in Hong Kong (2016). Department of Health.

What is a “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace”?

A “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” is where an organisation or enterprise provides an enabling and friendly environment for their lactating employees to sustain breastfeeding after they return to work. Specific measures include:

1. Lactation Breaks

During an eight-hour shift, allow employee to have two lactation breaks, each about 30 minutes (or one break about an hour), for at least one year after childbirth, and to adopt a flexible approach thereafter;

2. A Private Space

Arrange lactating employees a private space with a seat, a table and an electric outlet for (operating breast pumps);

3. Refrigerating Facilities

Provide refrigerating facilities (e.g. a pantry refrigerator) for employees' safe storage of expressed breastmilk.



Why does implementing “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” measures matter to organisations and enterprises?

Human resources are invaluable assets of organisations and enterprises. In tandem of social progress, to embrace employee’s choice of sustaining breastfeeding is an employee-oriented good practice in human resource management. Implementing “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” measures may:

- ✔ reduce the turnovers of experienced female employees
- ✔ boost morale and engage employees to work
- ✔ increase employee productivity and loyalty
- ✔ foster a positive image of organisation and enterprise, which is appealing to talents
- ✔ lower the chance of employees taking leaves from work³ for taking care of their sick children at home, because it was shown from studies that breastfed children are generally healthier
- ✔ prolong the overall breastfeeding duration among infants and young children; promote public health and reduce health care expenditure



Putting into Actions

Good communication and flexible arrangement are the keys to success in implementing “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” measures.

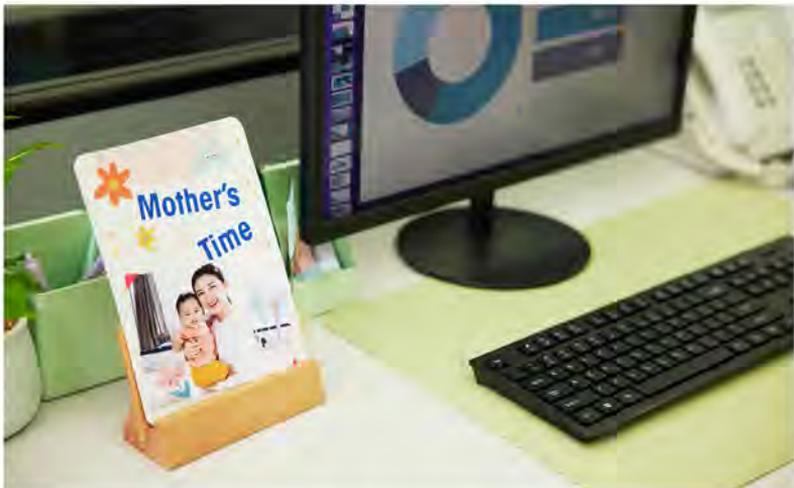
1. Develop a Written Policy

A written policy could unify the implementation of breastfeeding friendly measures in the workplace. It fosters communication among the management team, the lactating employees and the other staff members so that mutual understanding could be achieved. A sample of the written policy is shown in the Annex.

2. Allow Lactation Breaks

In an eight-hour work, allow employee to have two lactation breaks, each around 30 minutes (or one break around an hour) for at least one year after childbirth, and to adopt a flexible approach thereafter.

In accordance with the spirit of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention⁴, lactation breaks shall be included in the working hours and remunerated accordingly. Employers do not request employees to provide any proof for their breastfeeding status and to make up for the time used for milk expression.



4. ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) & Recommendation No. 191. International Labour Organisation, ILO

3. Provide Suitable Space and Facilities

(i) A Space with Privacy

Arrange a space with privacy for employees to express breastmilk, together with a seat, a table and an electrical socket (for connecting breastmilk pumps). It would be good if running water, sink, liquid soap and locker are also provided at the lactating space.



Below are some good examples of providing a space with privacy to lactating employees:

- ✓ Build in a lactation room in the workplace;
- ✓ Flexibly use the existing resources, for example, temporary use of a vacant conference room, multi-function room or changing room;
- ✓ Set up a screen or curtain in a secluded corner with a clear signage outside displaying phrase like “Mother’s Time”; or
- ✓ Allow employees to use nearby baby care facilities in the community during lactation breaks.

Point to Note



Washrooms are never a place for direct breast-feeding nor expression due to sanitary reasons.

(ii) Refrigerating Facilities

Provide refrigerating facilities (e.g. a pantry refrigerator) for employees' safe storage of breastmilk. Breastmilk is generally considered safe to store in an ordinary refrigerator or inside a cool box. A refrigerator designated for storing breastmilk is not necessary. Lactating employees could put the breastmilk containers inside a small plastic box and placed it inside the pantry refrigerator.



Questions & Responses

Question 1: How to support lactating staff with outdoor duties?

Response:

Supervisors and staff could discuss some flexible arrangement options; these arrangements could be adjusted along the growth of the breastfed children, for example:

- Allow staff to use community babycare facilities when they work outside; or
- Temporarily arrange alternative postings to accommodate staff's breastfeeding needs

Question 2: How to respond when staff asks for more or longer lactation breaks?

Response:

Supervisors please take into account for the need of some staff members asking for more or longer lactation breaks, for example, those who are still adapting their work after childbirth. They could use their spare time at the workplace (e.g. lunch time, the time before and after office hours) to cater their expression needs. In case of any concerns, lactating staff should seek advice from healthcare professionals.





Question 3: How to deal with possible grievances from other staff members?

Response:

Other staff members are not entitled to have equivalent time-off to lactation breaks while they may need to cover the duties of their lactating colleagues. Therefore, they may feel being treated unequally. Supervisors should ensure open communication among all levels in the organisation and let staff understand the long term benefits brought by these temporary breastfeeding-friendly measures.

Overseas experience indicates that most staff members, regardless of their gender, support breastfeeding friendly measures in their workplace.

Question 4: Is two lactation breaks a day still be applicable to staff who has been breastfeeding for more than a year?

Response:

When children reach the age of one, they are already eating a variety of food. Their daily milk intake and hence their mother's breastfeeding or expression frequency will reduce accordingly. At this stage, most breastfeeding mothers would need one lactation break a day. Employees are encouraged to discuss with their supervisors with a view to making operationally feasible arrangements at the workplace to accommodate their needs for continued breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding Friendly Policy at Workplace

Our Organisation (or Company) concurs, accepts and supports staff members' decision to continued breastfeeding when they return to work after childbirth.

The Policy is developed to guide actions that support the needs of lactating staff, aiming to combine breastfeeding and work. All staff members will be informed of this Policy to ensure they know about the details.

1.Expectant staff

Expectant staff who plan to breastfeed should discuss with their supervisors early so that both parties could have adequate time to prepare the work setting in advance.

2.Supervisors

Taking into account of practical situation, supervisors should provide support in providing an enabling environment for lactating staff. Specific measures include:

- i) Allowing lactation breaks (about two 30-minute breaks during an eight-hour shift or a one-hour break) for breastmilk expression for at least one year after childbirth, and to adopt a flexible approach thereafter;
- ii) Arranging a private space with a seat, a table and an electrical outlet (for operating breast pumps); and
- iii) Providing refrigerating facilities for safe storage of breastmilk.

3.Other staff

Other staff members should act positively to support colleagues' decision to sustained breastfeeding.

Staff who requires information on Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace or health advice on breastfeeding may refer to the resources provided by the Family Health Service of the Department of Health.

Family Health Service

Breastfeeding Hotline : 3618 7450



Department of Health



Health Information
on Breastfeeding



Frequently Asked Questions
about Breastfeeding



Babycare Facilities in
Government Premises



Breastfeeding Audio-
visual Resources

Family
Council



Family-friendly
Workplace

Equal
Opportunities
Commission



Let's Build a Breastfeeding-
friendly Workplace

Hong Kong
Committee
for UNICEF



#SayYesToBreastfeeding



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