



News Release

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Everyone Can Help Make Breastfeeding Easier, Surgeon General Says in “Call to Action”

Benjamin cites health benefits, offers steps for families, clinicians and employers

WASHINGTON, D.C. On Jan. 20, 2011, Surgeon General Regina M. Benjamin issued a [“Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding,”](#) outlining steps that can be taken to remove some of the obstacles faced by women who want to breastfeed their babies.

“Many barriers exist for mothers who want to breastfeed,” Dr. Benjamin said. “They shouldn’t have to go it alone. Whether you’re a clinician, a family member, a friend, or an employer, you can play an important part in helping mothers who want to breastfeed.”

“Of course, the decision to breastfeed is a personal one,” she added, “no mother should be made to feel guilty if she cannot or chooses not to breastfeed.”

While 75 percent of U.S. babies start out breastfeeding, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, only 13 percent are exclusively breastfed at the end of six months. The rates are particularly low among African-American infants.

Many mothers who attempt to breastfeed say several factors impede their efforts, such as a lack of support at home; absence of family members who have experience with breastfeeding; a lack of breastfeeding information from health care clinicians; a lack of time and privacy to breastfeed or express milk at the workplace; and an inability to connect with other breastfeeding mothers in their communities.

Dr. Benjamin’s “Call to Action” identifies ways that families, communities, employers and health care professionals can improve breastfeeding rates and increase support for breastfeeding:

- Communities should expand and improve programs that provide mother-to-mother support and peer counseling.
- Health care systems should ensure that maternity care practices provide education and counseling on breastfeeding. Hospitals should become more “baby-friendly,” by taking steps like those recommended by the UNICEF/WHO’s Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.

- Clinicians should ensure that they are trained to properly care for breastfeeding mothers and babies. They should promote breastfeeding to their pregnant patients and make sure that mothers receive the best advice on how to breastfeed.
- Employers should work toward establishing paid maternity leave and high-quality lactation support programs. Employers should expand the use of programs that allow nursing mothers to have their babies close by so they can feed them during the day. They should also provide women with break time and private space to express breast milk.
- Families should give mothers the support and encouragement they need to breastfeed.

Family members can help mothers prepare for breastfeeding and support their continued breastfeeding, including after her return to work or school.

According to the “Call to Action,” breastfeeding protects babies from infections and illnesses that include diarrhea, ear infections, and pneumonia. Breastfed babies are also less likely to develop asthma, and those who are breastfed for six months are less likely to become obese. Mothers themselves who breastfeed, have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

A study published last year in the journal *Pediatrics* estimated that the nation would save \$13 billion per year in health care and other costs if 90 percent of U.S. babies were exclusively breastfed for six months. Dr. Benjamin added that, by providing accommodations for nursing mothers, employers can reduce their company’s health care costs and lower their absenteeism and turnover rates.

“I believe that we as a nation are beginning to see a shift in how we think and talk about breastfeeding,” said Dr. Benjamin. “With this ‘Call to Action,’ I am urging everyone to help make breastfeeding easier.”

To order printed copies of the Surgeon General’s “Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding” and other materials, please call 1-800-CDC-INFO or email cdcinfo@cdc.gov and reference the publication title.

For more information on breastfeeding, go to www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding or www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/. To speak with a breastfeeding counselor call 1-800-994-9662 Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 6:00 p.m. ET.

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