



Employers' Guide

to Establishing Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace



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Combining Breastfeeding and Work

Breastmilk is nutritious and contains a variety of antibodies and immune cells for diseases prevention. It brings far more benefits to infants and young children than formula milk. Breastfeeding also helps mothers reduce the risk of breast and ovarian cancers. The World Health Organization recommends exclusively breastfeeding babies up to about six-month-old and gradually introducing appropriate solid food and continuing breastfeeding up to two-year-old and beyond.

With an increased awareness of breastfeeding among Hong Kong families and the implementation of a series of supportive measures by the Department of Health, the percentage of local mothers breastfeeding their newborns has increased from 66% a decade ago to 86% in 2014¹. However, local studies point out that the main reason for mothers to stop breastfeeding in the first three months after delivery is “returning to workplace”². Many working mothers comment that it is difficult to express breastmilk in workplace even if they want to continue breastfeeding their children³.



¹Regular reports received by the Department of Health from all maternity units of public and private hospitals in Hong Kong.

²Tarrant M et al. Breastfeeding and weaning practices among Hong Kong mothers: a prospective study. BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth 2010 10:27.

³Tarrant 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.

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What is “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace”?

“Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” is where an organisation or enterprise provides an appropriate and friendly environment for their breastfeeding employees to express breastmilk in workplace in order to continue breastfeeding their children. The following three measures are to be in place:

1. Allowing lactation breaks for employees to express breastmilk within a year after delivery (two thirty-minute lactation breaks or an hour in total for an eight-hour working day);
2. Providing a space with privacy, an appropriate chair, a table and an electrical socket for connecting breastmilk pumps; and
3. Providing a refrigerator for storing breastmilk (a pantry refrigerator will do).

What are the benefits to organisations or enterprises by Establishing “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace”?

Human resources are the invaluable assets of organisations and enterprises. In a bid to retain and attract talents, many employers provide generous fringe benefits and training on top of competitive salaries. Accepting employees’ choices to continue breastfeeding in workplace in a friendly way is one of the fringe benefits that suits the society nowadays. These family-friendly measures can reduce the turn-overs of female employees including the experienced ones. Overseas studies indicate that breastfed children are relatively healthier, the parents take less absence for taking care of sick children and also face relatively less pressure⁴.

In addition to the win-win situation of employers and employees, the implementation of “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” measure can help prolong the breastfeeding duration of infants and young children, promote the overall health of our society and reduce health care expenditure.



⁴U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Business Case for Breastfeeding. Steps for Creating a Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite: For Business Managers. 2008.

Put into Actions

Flexible arrangement and quality communication is essential in the implementation of “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” measures. Good communication between management, breastfeeding employees and the other colleagues is needed to attain mutual understanding and harmonious coordination.

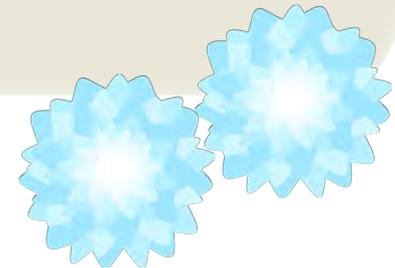
1. Develop a Written Policy

Develop a written organisation policy on “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace”, which will enhance communication among management and staff, and align practices in workplace. Please make reference to the “Policy Sample”.

2. Lactation Breaks

Breastfeeding is a natural way to feed a baby. In accordance with the spirit of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention⁵, a lactation break shall be included in working hours and remunerated accordingly. The following are recommended good measures:

- (i) Allow two thirty-minute lactation breaks or an hour in total for an eight-hour working day;
- (ii) Lactation breaks are recommended to be counted as “paid” working hours;
- (iii) Employees are not expected to replenish for the time used for milk expression; and
- (iv) Prove of breastfeeding status is not required for providing lactation breaks.



⁵ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) & Recommendation No. 191. International Labour Organization, ILO

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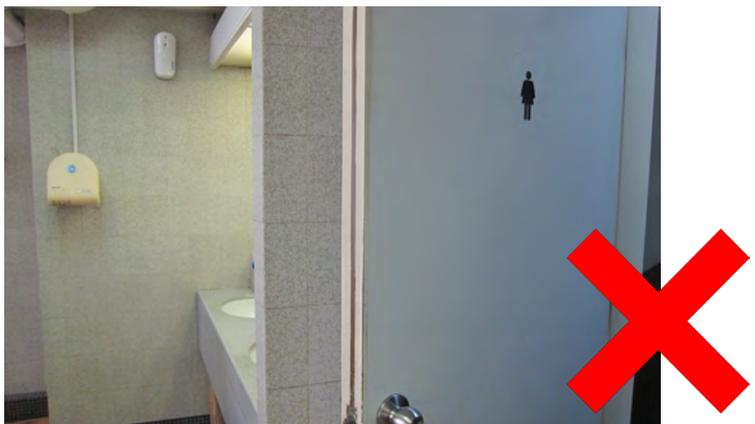
3. Facilities for Milk Expression

Existing resources can be deployed flexibly to provide employees a place for expressing breastmilk with privacy. Below are some examples on the arrangements:

- (i) Provide a lactation room for employees;
- (ii) Use existing rooms such as conference rooms, multi-function rooms or changing room temporarily for milk expression;
- (iii) Set up a screen or curtain in a secluded corner for expressing breastmilk and display a signage such as “mummy’s break, please wait”; or
- (iv) Allow employees to visit nearby community baby care facilities during lactation breaks.



However, toilets or restrooms are absolutely not suitable for sanitary reasons.



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The following facilitates and measures are needed in a breastmilk expression location:

- a) A chair with back rest for breastfeeding mothers to sit down when expressing breastmilk;
- b) A small table for placing items needed during breastmilk expression;
- c) A power socket; and
- d) Other facilities such as liquid soap, running water and sinks as well as lockers can be considered.

4. Refrigeration Facilities for Keeping Breastmilk

Breastmilk is characterised by its antibacterial properties. Storing in a refrigerator or a cool box is generally safe. Simply put the expressed milk in a box placed inside the pantry refrigerator will do. A separate refrigerator is not needed.



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Frequently Asked Questions

Question 1: How to support breastfeeding employees with outdoor duties?

Answer 1: The successful implementation of “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” measure depends on an open communication between employers and employees. Employers can discuss with employees, arrange flexibly their outdoor working time, or consider some flexible arrangements like the examples below:

- (i) Allow employees to use nearby community baby care facilities; or
- (ii) Arrange posting of breastfeeding employees so that they can continue to express breastmilk at work.

These flexible arrangements will be reduced gradually when babies grow up.

Question 2: How to respond if more lactation breaks or longer breaks are requested by breastfeeding employees?

Answer 2: Some breastfeeding mothers may need more breaks or longer breaks to express breastmilk, like those who are just returning to work. They take time to adapt to a new milk expression environment. These mothers may consider using their spare time to express breastmilk such as lunchtime, the time before or after working hours. Moreover, they can seek advice from medical professionals on breastfeeding related concerns.

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Question 3: How to deal with the possible grievances of other employees?

Answer 3: Some employees may feel unfair, for example, the need to take up tasks or duties for breastfeeding employees during their lactation breaks and not having equivalent rest time. Fortunately, overseas experience indicates that the majority of employees, regardless of their genders, support the implementation of breastfeeding friendly measures in workplace.

Frequent communication between management staff, breastfeeding employees and the rest of all, making known the temporary nature of the measures and the long-term benefits for multiple parties will all facilitate a successful implementation.

Question 4: If an employee has been breastfeeding for more than a year, is the employer required to continue granting her two lactation breaks a day?

Answer 4: When children become one-year-old, they are already having a variety of food. The daily milk intake and the frequency of breastfeeding or breastmilk expressions will reduce accordingly. In this stage, most breastfeeding mothers only need one lactation break a day. The employer can make arrangement flexibly.



(Policy Sample)

“Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace” Policy

Our Organisation (or Company) recognises employees’ choices to breastfeed, accepts and supports employees returning to work after delivery to continue breastfeeding.

The Policy aims to provide an appropriate and friendly environment for breastfeeding employees so that breastfeeding is compatible with work. All employees should be informed of this Policy to ensure that they are aware of it.

1. Expectant Mothers

Discuss with the management as soon as possible about their wishes to continue breastfeeding in workplace after returning to office to facilitate a good preparation by both parties in a comfortable timeframe.

2. Management Staff

Consider the practical situation and provide an appropriate and friendly environment including the basic measures below:

- (i) Allowing lactation breaks for employees to express breastmilk within one year after delivery (two thirty-minute lactation breaks or an hour in total for an eight-hour working day);
- (ii) Providing a space with privacy, an appropriate chair, a table and an electrical socket for connecting breastmilk pumps; and
- (iii) Providing a refrigerator for storing breastmilk.

3. Co-workers

Accept and support the choices of colleagues returning to office after delivery to continue breastfeeding in workplace.

Employees who wish to access breastfeeding related information and professional advice can browse the resources provided by the Family Health Service of the Department of Health as below:

- An Employee’s Guide to Combining Breastfeeding with Work: <http://s.fhs.gov.hk/i9uvr>
- Maternal and Child Health Centres: Breastfeeding Counseling Service

For more breastfeeding information, please browse the website of the Family Health Service of the Department of Health at www.fhs.gov.hk:

Health Information on Breastfeeding
<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/xknkz>

Baby Care Facilities in Government Premises
<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/enwss>

An Employee’s Guide to Combining Breastfeeding with Work
<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/i9uvr>

Breastfeeding Resources
of the
Department of Health



unicef
聯合國兒童基金會

Your company/organization can provide time, space and support to help mothers sustain breastfeeding.

Pledge your support to breastfeeding mothers now.

www.SayYesToBreastfeeding.hk

Contact us to learn more

☎ 2833 6139 ✉ bf@unicef.org.hk



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Website www.fhs.gov.hk