

# World Breastfeeding Week

## Breastfeeding and work: let's make it work!



### Breastfeeding is good for the economy

The positive impact of breastfeeding on the economy, both at macro and micro level, is often not acknowledged, even if the benefits afforded by breastfeeding to the health of the mother and child are well known.

Expenditure on health care can be significantly reduced. For example, in the US the direct health care costs for children associated with the low rates of breastfeeding were estimated to be \$ 2.2 billion in 2007[1]. In Mexico, the estimated direct and indirect costs associated with no breastfeeding ranged from \$455.7 to \$2,126.6 million in 2012[2]. Moreover, a healthier workplace will result from breastfeeding[3].

The benefits for the work place may not be as visible but include:

- Loyalty with the company as a result of gratitude and satisfaction
- Reduced absenteeism because babies get sick less often and less severely[4]
- Retention of employees (reducing the need of training and the loss of qualified personnel)
- Improved productivity

Depending on the insurance policies of the country, it may affect insurance costs substantially. In addition, it contributes to a better corporate image. One example is CIGNA Insurance Company, which saves \$240,000 a year in health care expenses with women who breastfeed[5].

### Ways to support breastfeeding by working mothers

Promotion and support of breastfeeding by mothers that work outside the house take into account the World Health Organization recommendations to breastfeed exclusively for six months and to continue breastfeeding for at least two years or more[6]. To comply with these recommendations, employers should provide breastfeeding women the following workplace accommodations:

- Maternity leave
- Nursing room
- Reduced work hours or flexible schedule while breastfeeding

### Maternity leave

The International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 183 states that every woman should be entitled to maternity leave of at least 14 weeks. Recommendation 191, signed by several countries in the Region, says that countries should aim at providing maternity leave of at least 18 weeks [7].

### Nursing room

A room that is private, comfortable and hygienic should be provided so that breastmilk can be expressed during work hours. In addition, a chair, a refrigerator, a sink and an electric outlet (in case electrical pumps are used) are necessary.

### Reduced hours and flexible time

ILO Convention 183 provides a woman the right to one or more daily breaks or a daily reduction of hours of work to breastfeed her child[7]. Breastfeeding mothers need to express milk every 3 to 4 hours, otherwise they will feel uncomfortable, and breastmilk production may be affected, since it works on a supply-demand basis.

### Situation on the implementation of the ILO recommendations in the Americas

Maternity leave in the Americas: 10 out of 38 countries (Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Panama, Peru and Venezuela) provide at least 14 weeks of maternity leave, as established by ILO Convention 183 (Table). This represents 28% of the countries for which information is available (Figure). Of these 10 countries, only three follow ILO's Recommendation 191 of providing 18 weeks or more – Chile with 24 weeks, and Cuba and Venezuela with 18.

Figure. Percentage of countries in the Americas according to the number of weeks of maternity leave



Most countries provide 100% of salary, with others providing between 60% and 65%. Paternity leave is rare with only Argentina, Bahamas, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela having provisions.

**Table. Maternity leave, salary earned during maternity leave and paternity leave<sup>1</sup>**

Country	Maternity leave (total number of weeks)	Salary earned during maternity leave (percentage)	Paternity leave (total number of days)
Antigua & Barbuda	13	100% for 6 weeks, 60% for 7 weeks	0
Argentina	13	100%	2
Bahamas	12	100%	7
Barbados	12	100%	0
Belize	14	100%	0
Bolivia	13	100%	0
Brazil	17	100%	5
Canada	17	100%	0
Cayman Islands	12	100%	Only for workers in the public sector
Chile <sup>2</sup>	24	100%	5 (or up to 42 days of those not used by mother)
Colombia	14	100%	4
Costa Rica	16	100%	0
Cuba	18	100%	Parents can choose who stays home until child is 1 year old
Dominica	12	60%	0
Dominican Republic	12	100%	0
Ecuador	12	100%	10
El Salvador	12	100%	0
Grenada	12	65%	0
Guatemala	12	100%	2
Guyana	13	70%	0
Haití	12	100%	0
Honduras	12	100%	0
Jamaica	12	100%	0
Mexico	12	100%	0
Nicaragua	12	100%	0
Panama	14	100%	0
Paraguay	12	100%	2
Peru <sup>3</sup>	14	100%	4
St Kitts & Nevis	13	65%	0
St. Vincent & Grenadines	13	65%	0
Santa Lucía	13	100%	0
Suriname	0	NA	0
Trinidad & Tobago	13	100%	0
United States <sup>4</sup>	0	NA <sup>***</sup>	0
Uruguay	12	100%	10
Venezuela	18	100%	14

Source: Unicef. Child care and parental leave. Challenges, Number 12, July 2011. Available at [http://www.unicef.org/lac/challenges\\_12\\_eclac-unicef.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/lac/challenges_12_eclac-unicef.pdf)

1 Countries in the shaded rows have legislation providing 14 weeks of paid maternity leave or more

2 In 2011, Chile passed legislation to extend maternity leave to 24 weeks (<http://www.dt.gob.cl/1601/w3-article-99872.html>)

3 Peru recently approved legislation providing 14 weeks of maternity leave (<http://www.laboraperu.com/peru-ratifica-convenio-183-oit-licencia-maternidad.html>)

4 The US has legislation that provides 12 weeks of disability leave, which can be used for maternity leave (see Box 1)

*[A] woman to whom this Convention applies shall be entitled to a period of maternity leave of not less than 14 weeks.*

Convention No. 183, Article 4(1)

**Nursing breaks:** Among 29 Latin American and Caribbean countries for which there is available data, 20 (or 69%) have legislation that provides paid or unpaid daily breaks or a daily reduction of hours of work for nursing employees. In most of these, the total duration of breaks (often divided into two breaks) is one hour. In the Americas, 11 countries provide at least six months of breastfeeding breaks, with four of these providing 12 months (Bolivia, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Peru)[7].

*A woman shall be provided with the right to one or more daily breaks or a daily reduction of hours of work to breastfeed her child. (...) These breaks or the reduction of daily hours of work shall be counted as working time and remunerated accordingly.*

Convention No. 183, Article 10 (1)(2)

**Nursing rooms:** In 14 countries, provision of nursing facilities is mandatory, although the room specifications vary [7]. In Colombia, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, for example, a room to breastfeed must be provided by every employer. In other countries, as Ecuador for example, this applies only to companies with 50 employees or more.

*Where practicable, provision should be made for the establishment of facilities for nursing under adequate hygienic conditions at or near the workplace*

Recommendation No. 191, Paragraph 9

## **What can governments, employers, co-workers, mothers and fathers do to support breastfeeding?**

### **Governments can:**

- Ratify, implement and monitor ILO Convention 183 and in addition implement Recommendation 191, which calls for maternity leave of at least 18 weeks and at least one nursing break a day or reduced work hours and provisions for private rooms for milk expression or breastfeeding.
- Stipulate even longer maternal leave, as have some countries in the Region.

- Have a political commitment to regulate and ensure compliance with legislation to protect breastfeeding by working mothers

### **Employers can:**

- Have a policy that is communicated to all staff that the company or organization supports breastfeeding by their employees
- Provide conditions to facilitate compliance with the WHO recommendations for breastfeeding
- Ensure that the workplace has a nursing room that is private, comfortable, hygienic and easily accessible.
- Be flexible with respect to breaks to breastfeed or extract milk

### **Co-workers can:**

- Cover tasks when their co-worker needs to take a break to breastfeed or extract breastmilk
- Motivate the mother to persist breastfeeding and abstain from using formulas
- If feasible, offer help with transportation of baby or breastmilk

### **Mothers can:**

- Know their rights with regard to maternity leave and their employers' breastfeeding policies, including the availability of a private room to extract breast milk or breastfeed
- If there is not breastfeeding policy, inform her employer about the need for breaks to express milk and a private room for expressing breastmilk or breastfeeding
- Practice extracting and freezing breast milk while on maternity leave to have milk already stored when returning to work.
- Work with their employer and fellow employees to find a solution together.

### **Fathers can:**

- Encourage and support the mother to continue breastfeeding after going back to work
- Practice feeding the baby expressed breastmilk with a cup before the mother returns to work
- Do their part of the household chores
- If realistic, take the baby to nurse at the mother's workplace

## Box 1. Maternity leave in some countries

### **Bahamas**

In the Bahamas, under the Employment Act, female employees are entitled to maternity leave of 12 weeks. Women who are contributors to the National Insurance and who meet the criteria for number of contributions are paid a maternity benefit, equivalent to two thirds of insured income, for 13 weeks, and this can be extended by up to six weeks under certain circumstances such as illness. Fathers are eligible for a week's family-related leave.

### **Brazil**

Mandatory paid maternity leave for 120 days and fiscal incentives for voluntary paid leave for an additional 60 days are part of Brazil's policies. Employees in the federal government and many state governments have the right to 180 days. Many cities have adopted this legislation also. In addition, new mothers have the right to two breaks a day of 30 minutes each, until the baby is six months old.

### **Chile**

Illustrating their recognition of the importance of breastfeeding and commitment WHO's exclusive breastfeeding recommendation for six months, Chile passed legislation stipulating 24 weeks of paid maternity leave. It is the first country in the Americas to do so and thus serves a model for the countries in the continent. The already high rates of exclusive breastfeeding in Chile are expected to increase even more.

### **United States**

New mothers can take 12 weeks of unpaid leave if they have worked for 12 months and the company has more than 50 employees. Federal agencies grant up to 6 weeks of advance sick leave following the birth of a baby. Some states (California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island) have provisions for paid maternity leave. The Affordable Care Act, signed in 2010, requires employers to provide reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth each time such employee has need to express the milk and to provide a private place to express breastmilk.

## Box 2. Examples of companies and organizations that protect breastfeeding by working mothers

### **Pan American Health Organization**

PAHO offers to staff members 16 weeks of paid maternity leave and a reduced schedule of two hours per day for up to two years while mothers are breastfeeding. PAHO's headquarters and some country offices also provide private nursing rooms and has provisions for mothers to take their babies with them on work-related travel (policy is available at [www.paho.org/wbw](http://www.paho.org/wbw)).

### **Tech corporations\***

Examples of generous breastfeeding support policies are provided by Facebook, Apple, Google, Twitter, Instagram and Reddit. Facebook offers four months of paid leave for mother and father, a bonus called "baby cash", in addition to providing nursing rooms in its headquarters. Apple's paid leave totals up to four weeks before delivery and 14 weeks after. Google offers 18 weeks of paid maternity leave (22 weeks in case of complications). It also gives non-primary caregivers 7 weeks of paid leave and provides nursing rooms in all buildings. Twitter provides 20 weeks of paid maternity leave. Instagram and Reddit both offer 17 weeks of paid leave for new mothers and fathers alike.

Source: <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/the-best-and-worst-companies-for-new-moms-and-dads-in-silicon-valley/386384/>

## References

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3. World Health Organization., Breastfeeding Policy Brief. 2014, WHO: Geneva.
4. Cohen, R., M.B. Mrtek, and R.G. Mrtek, Comparison of maternal absenteeism and infant illness rates among breastfeeding and formula-feeding women in two corporations. *Am J Health Promot*, 1995. 10(2): p. 148-53.
5. Office of Women's Health and US Health and Human Services. <http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/employer-solutions/business-case.html>. Accessed July 17, 2015.
6. WHO, Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. 2003, World Health Organization: Geneva.
7. International Labour Organization, Maternity and paternity at work. Law and practice across the world. 2014, ILO: Geneva.

## Resources

[www.paho.org/wbw](http://www.paho.org/wbw)

<http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>

[http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/globaltargets2025\\_policybrief\\_breastfeeding/en/](http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/globaltargets2025_policybrief_breastfeeding/en/)

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/employer-solutions/>

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