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# Guidance on supporting breastfeeding mothers returning to work (2013)

The Ministry of Health is committed to ensuring that New Zealand workplaces are supported to create a comfortable and supportive environment that enables mothers returning to work to continue breastfeeding.

The key principles of this guidance are to:

* encourage and support employees breastfeeding within the workplace
* promote the benefits of breastfeeding within the workplace
* provide accurate and helpful information for breastfeeding mothers returning to work
* support mothers to maintain breastfeeding when returning to work
* provide suitable facilities that support breastfeeding/expressing and storing breast milk at work
* provide access to [health education](https://www.healthed.govt.nz/resource/eating-healthy-breastfeeding-womenng%C4%81-kai-totika-m%C4%81-te-%C5%ABkaip%C5%8D) resources relating to food and nutrition when breastfeeding
* provide information about further support for breastfeeding mothers.

## Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding provides the best nutrition for babies and supports the health and wellbeing of mothers (Ministry of Health 2012a). Research has shown that breastfeeding improves babies’ immunity and physical development, and fosters a stronger bond between mother and baby (Workwell 2012).

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended by the Ministry until babies are around six months old, with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods until babies are at least one year of age or beyond (Ministry of Health 2008). Many mothers return to work before this time.

Breastfeeding is important for babies because it:

* provides the optimum nutrition for them
* assists their physical and emotional development
* decreases the incidence and severity of childhood infectious diseases
* is associated with decreased infant mortality and hospitalisation
* is associated with a decreased risk of chronic disease.

# Ministry of Health 2012b

Breastfeeding is important for the mother returning to work because it:

* reduces the risk of pre-menopausal cancer
* may reduce the risk of ovarian cancer
* may reduce the risk of osteoporosis and hip problems
* can inspire other healthy lifestyle choices for the mother such as smoking cessation.

# Ministry of Health 2012b

#### Benefits of breastfeeding to the employer

Mothers who are supported to breastfeed at work by their **employers:**

* **have lower absenteeism as their own health and that of their baby is better**
* **are at lower risk of mastitis**
* **have higher productivity and loyalty (**Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces 2011).

## The legislation

The [Employment Relations (Breaks, Infant Feeding and Other Matters) Amendment Act](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2008/0058/latest/DLM1229708.html) 2008 requires employers to provide appropriate facilities and breaks for employees who wish to breastfeed during work, where it is reasonable and practicable. The amendments balance the need to support the work-life balance and child care responsibilities of employees, with work commitments.

A [Code of Employment Practice on Infant Feeding](http://www.dol.govt.nz/er/holidaysandleave/parentalleave/infantfeeding/code.asp) (the Code) has been developed by the Department of Labour in consultation with groups such as Business New Zealand, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, women’s community and health groups, and the Ministry of Health.

The Code provides useful advice on the range of factors an employer can consider when negotiating breastfeeding arrangements. The Code gives practical ideas on factors to consider such as health and safety, space, facilities and resources required for breastfeeding employees.

Under the Code, employers are required to ensure:

* breastfeeding benefits are promoted within the workplace
* breastfeeding is encouraged and supported within the workplace
* mothers are able to take suitable breaks (unpaid) to breastfeed and/or express milk at work (or offsite) if reasonable and practical.

Employers should ensure suitable:

* breastfeeding facilities are available at workplaces where reasonable and practical
  + facilities should be quiet, comfortable and private
  + facilities do not need to be permanent i.e. a screened off area may be a practical option if a separate room cannot be provided
  + there should be a low, comfortable chair with armrests available
* facilities for expressing and storing breast milk are available
  + there should be a clean space to store equipment
  + there should be a separate refrigerator for storing breast milk
  + there should be a sink with hot water and a clean flat surface to wash breast pumps
  + there should be hygienic hand washing facilities
* facilities are available for breastfeeding in potential new premises.

Employers should ensure:

* toilet facilities are not designated for breastfeeding as they are not suitable for this purpose
* sick bays are only utilised for breastfeeding where absolutely necessary
  + these facilities should meet all the requirements of the Code.

## Information for mothers who are returning to work

Breastfeeding mothers returning to work need to be given information about their employer’s responsibilities and commitments to supporting and promoting the continuation of breastfeeding at work. Information about breastfeeding facilities available should also be provided by the employer.

Employers should:

* advise managers of those women returning from parental leave of their obligations to provide breastfeeding breaks to the returning parent where reasonable
* advise managers of those women returning from parental leave about the importance of being flexible and reasonable with regard to the timing of breastfeeding breaks
* include a section in the return to work letter on where to find information for returning to work after having a child (where applicable)
* attach this guidance to the return to work letter sent out to all parents returning after parental leave
  + consider providing a link to the [health education](https://www.healthed.govt.nz/resource/eating-healthy-breastfeeding-womenng%C4%81-kai-totika-m%C4%81-te-%C5%ABkaip%C5%8D) resources relating to food and nutrition when breastfeeding in the return to work letter.

## Support groups and further information

The following organisations may be able to help with breastfeeding information and advice:

* [La Leche League](http://www.lalecheleague.org.nz/)
* [New Zealand Lactation Consultants Association](http://www.nzlca.org.nz/find.html)
* [Royal New Zealand Plunket Society](http://www.plunket.org.nz/)
* [New Zealand College of Midwives](http://www.midwife.org.nz/)
* [The Breastfeeding Peer Counsellor Programme](http://www.pcp.org.nz/)
* [Women’s Health Action Trust.](http://www.womens-health.org.nz/breastfeeding.html)

# References

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Ministry of Health. 2008. *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Infants and Toddlers (Aged 0-2): A background paper (4th Ed).* Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health. 2009. *National Strategic Plan of Action for Breastfeeding 2008-2012.* URL: <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-strategic-plan-action-breastfeeding-2008-2012> Accessed 2 October 2013.

Ministry of Health. 2012a. *Breastfeeding homepage.* URL: <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/life-stages/maternity-and-breastfeeding/breastfeeding> Accessed 2 October 2013.

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