



Campaign urges moms to breastfeed longer

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Aug. 07--San Mateo County is launching a campaign this month to encourage mothers to breastfeed longer, for at least the first six months of their babies' lives.

The effort, which will include newspaper and bus shelter ads, is funded through an \$80,000 state grant and timed with National Breastfeeding Month.

Breastfeeding increases health benefits and decreases the risk of childhood obesity, asthma and diabetes, according to San Mateo County health officials. Mothers benefit as well, as studies show that breastfeeding lowers their risk of obesity, Type 3 diabetes, postpartum depression, and breast, ovarian and endometrial cancers.

Babies need nothing but breast milk for the first six months, according to Anne Garrett, a nurse and the supervisor of breastfeeding support services for the county's Women Infants and Children Program.

According to the state Women Infants and Children Program, formula-fed babies have a greater risk of ear infections, diarrhea/constipation, pneumonia and sudden infant death syndrome.

The county's campaign will also reach out to clinics and new mothers' support networks.

Without social support, many women stop breastfeeding after returning to school or work.

In addition to health benefits, the county aims to educate women about state laws on breastfeeding.

California's Lactation Accommodation Law requires employers to provide break time for mothers to pump milk for their children unless it would seriously disrupt business operations. Employers don't have to pay for the pump session time if it happens outside of a break.

A lactating woman typically needs to express milk about every two to three hours when she is away from her baby, with about 20 to 40 minutes needed for each pump session, according to the California Department of Public Health.

Under state law, employers must also make a "reasonable effort" to provide the employee with a private space, other than a toilet stall, so she can pump milk.

"Many women don't know about the law or don't have the confidence to ask their employer," Garrett said. In addition, state law provides that in most cases a mother may breastfeed her child in any location where the mother and child would otherwise be permitted. One exception is the private homes of others.

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