

How Communities Can Help

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding

Across the United States, most new mothers hope to breastfeed. Breastfeeding can protect the health of babies and their mothers. With support from their families and communities, mothers are more likely to be able to breastfeed their babies.

How You Can Help Mothers Breastfeed

Use social marketing to promote breastfeeding.

Social marketing is a way to use marketing practices to influence behavioral change in positive ways. Communities can use social marketing and new types of media to make sure that families understand the value of breastfeeding and make well-informed decisions about how to feed their babies. For ideas and information, see CDC's Gateway to Health Communication & Social Marketing Practice.*

Set up programs for new fathers and grandmothers.

Leading health organizations[†] agree that most babies should have only breast milk for the first 6 months of life and should be breastfed for at least 12 months. New mothers rely on their partners and their own mothers for help and advice on how to feed their babies. Family members need up-to-date information so they can help mothers make decisions about breastfeeding. They may not know that breastfeeding can help protect both mothers and their babies from serious health risks.

Strengthen mother-to-mother support.

Talking with other women who are breastfeeding can help mothers decide to start and keep breastfeeding. Communities can support mother-to-mother groups and develop peer counseling programs in health care settings; both are good ways to connect breastfeeding mothers with each other.

Help mothers find resources in the community.

If mothers get the support they need in the first 4 weeks of a new baby's life, they are more likely to keep breastfeeding. Mothers may need help finding people who are trained to assist with breastfeeding problems after they leave the hospital. Without help, some new mothers may stop breastfeeding. Communities often provide a number of resources and programs to help breastfeeding mothers.

Ensure that community groups support breastfeeding.

Nonprofit community service organizations, early childhood education programs, peer support organizations, and breastfeeding clinics know about the barriers to breastfeeding that mothers in their communities face. These groups can help find ways of removing these barriers.

Find ways to let working mothers be with their babies.

One way to combine work with breastfeeding is for mothers to breastfeed the baby during the workday. Recognize employers who let mothers telecommute or work flexible or part time hours, and those who find new ways to support breastfeeding in the workplace. Communities can encourage employers to make child care available nearby so working mothers can go to their babies to breastfeed during the workday.

* Available at www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication.

[†] Includes the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Nurse-Midwives, American Dietetic Association, and American Public Health Association.



How Your Community Can Take Action

- Make a commitment to support breastfeeding mothers where you live. Make sure your community helps mothers who want to breastfeed.
- Encourage community programs and organizations to build on the support that mothers receive in the hospital.
- Use the resources of your community to connect mothers to assistance such as mother-to-mother support groups that can help them keep breastfeeding even if they have problems.
- Look at the selected actions recommended by the Surgeon General (see next page) to make support for breastfeeding part of the life of your community.
- By taking these actions, you can help improve the health of breastfeeding mothers and their babies in your community.



From the Surgeon General

Selected Actions for Communities to Support Breastfeeding

Programs for Families

Action 2. Develop programs to educate fathers and grandmothers about breastfeeding.

- Launch or establish campaigns for breastfeeding education that target a mother's primary support network, including fathers and grandmothers.
- Offer classes on breastfeeding that are convenient for family members to attend.

Mother-to-Mother Support

Action 3. Strengthen programs that provide mother-to-mother support and peer counseling.

- Create and maintain a sustainable infrastructure for mother-to-mother support groups and for peer counseling programs in hospitals and community health care settings.
- Establish peer counseling as a core service available to all women in WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children).

Community-Based Organizations

Action 4. Use community-based organizations to promote and support breastfeeding.

- Support and fund small nonprofit organizations that promote breastfeeding in communities of color.
- Integrate education and support for breastfeeding into public health programs that serve new families.
- Ensure around-the-clock access to resources that provide assistance with breastfeeding.

Social Marketing

Action 5. Create a national campaign to promote breastfeeding.

- Develop and implement a national public health campaign on breastfeeding that relies heavily on social marketing.
- Use a variety of media venues to reach young women and their families.



Care from Hospital to Community

Action 8. Develop systems to guarantee continuity of skilled support for lactation between hospitals and health care settings in the community.

- Create comprehensive statewide networks for home- or clinic-based follow-up care to be provided to every newborn in the state.
- Establish partnerships for integrated and continuous follow-up care after discharge from the hospital.
- Establish and implement policies and programs to ensure that participants in WIC have services in place before discharge from the hospital.

Recognize Innovative Worksite Programs

Action 15. Expand the use of programs in the workplace that allow lactating mothers to have direct access to their babies.

- Create incentive or recognition programs for businesses that establish, subsidize, and support child care centers at or near the business site.
- Identify and promote innovative programs that allow mothers to directly breastfeed their babies after they return to work.