



Breastfeeding at work

Work life balance fact sheet 9

What employers should know

Women returning from parental leave may need to either breastfeed or express milk at work. Employers have an obligation to take all reasonable measures to accommodate these employees, for example by providing adequate time and a suitable space during the working day.

It is important to abide by anti-discrimination laws when dealing with breastfeeding requests. For example, the Federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* makes it unlawful for an employer (or potential employer) to discriminate against a woman on the basis that she is breastfeeding.

Benefits of supporting breastfeeding mothers in the workplace

Supporting breastfeeding mothers is a low cost initiative that actively promotes work life balance and workplace productivity. Accommodating breastfeeding in the workplace may result in:

- a quicker return to work after parental leave;
- improved retention of employees after parental leave;
- reduced sick leave and absenteeism - due in part to the associated health benefits of breastfeeding; and
- enhanced employee morale and commitment.

How to accommodate breastfeeding at work

Employers can support breastfeeding employees through a range of initiatives.

Lactation breaks

Lactation breaks allow time during working hours for a mother to either feed her baby or express breast milk. These are generally provided in addition to standard meal and tea breaks. The recognised standard for lactation breaks is two 30-minute breaks in each eight hour working day

There is no legal requirement for these breaks to be paid, and employees can be required to make up the time at the end of the day. Ideally, an agreement about the provision of lactation breaks should be reached prior to an employee returning from parental leave.

Breastfeeding and expressing facilities

Breastfeeding employees need a hygienic and private area to feed the baby or express breast milk - a separate room or a section of a room for this purpose, depending on the size of workplace. The toilet area is not considered acceptable. Other facilities include:

- a hygienic and private lockable area for breast pumps and other equipment;
- access to hand washing facilities; and
- adequate refrigerator space for storing breast milk.

Employers should discuss specific requirements with female employees who wish to continue breastfeeding when returning to work.

Workplace support

Breastfeeding is a normal and important part of parental responsibility. Female employees should be provided with emotional and physical support for breastfeeding in the workplace. Employers should ensure that breastfeeding employees are not subjected to any criticism, harassment or discrimination.

Developing a workplace breastfeeding policy

Employers may choose to develop and implement a formal workplace breastfeeding policy to highlight their commitment to work life balance. In developing a policy, employers may wish to:

- examine the informal practices already operating in the workplace;
- conduct a safety audit of the work environment to ensure that it is safe for women with breastfeeding responsibilities;
- ensure flexible return to work options (part time work, job sharing) are available if required;
- consult with employees about the issues and their concerns;
- include breastfeeding and potential issues in training on workplace harassment and discrimination; and
- identify what other companies have done to support women in this area.

Where to go for more information

Further information about work life balance strategies is available from the Department of Commerce work life website www.worklife.wa.gov.au