
GUIDELINES FOR THE BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY FOOD PANTRY

Recommendations and best practices for food pantries of all sizes to fully support breastfeeding families



“Food banks have the potential to improve food security outcomes when operational resources are adequate, provisions of perishable food groups are available, and client needs are identified and addressed.”

Bazerghi et al, 2016



These guidelines were created by the Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition, with input from the Advancing Breastfeeding across Colorado team and other partners working in public health, human lactation, and food security. Leadership was provided by Boulder County Public Health.

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These guidelines are for managers, employees, volunteers, partner organizations, and those who handle food donations, work directly with the public, and conduct educational programs in food pantries.

All About Breast Milk and Breastfeeding

Lifelong Health Protections

- Breastfed infants receive protections against respiratory infections, diarrhea and other stomach problems, allergies, asthma, and eczema. They are also less likely to die of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and have a lower risk of diabetes and certain types of cancer.
- Persons who breastfeed are less likely to get diabetes, breast cancer, or have a heart attack later in life.
- Breastfeeding enhances bonding between parent and baby, which can help to manage stress.

Breastfeeding frequently and emptying the breasts regularly helps to maintain a healthy supply of milk. Anyone with concerns about milk production should consult a lactation professional for guidance. When parents learn to understand their infants' feeding cues, they can practice responsive feeding. There will be periods when babies feed more frequently due to growth spurts or environmental stressors.

All major medical organizations promote breastfeeding for optimal child health and development and recommend breastfeeding for as long as the parent and child want to continue. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all babies receive only breast milk for their first six months. This is called "exclusive breastfeeding," meaning that the babies receive only breast milk and no infant formula, solid foods, or water. This is the healthiest choice for babies because exclusive breastfeeding helps:

- Babies to stay healthier.
- Babies to grow better.
- Moms to make enough milk for their babies.

Food Pantries and Breastfeeding Families

Food pantries play a critical role in supporting breastfeeding families. It's important for food pantry staff and volunteers to understand how to support families choosing to breastfeed. It is also important for them to understand how to support breastfeeding staff and volunteers by providing them with adequate break time and space to express breast milk or breastfeed their babies while working their shifts.

In many places across the United States, nearly 90% of families choose to start breastfeeding. But for them to continue breastfeeding their babies exclusively and for longer periods of time, they need support. Families with lower incomes also tend to have reduced access to breastfeeding support, and they experience more barriers; thus, they often tend to stop breastfeeding earlier.

WHO Code: In 1981, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted recommendations called the "WHO Code," which governs how breast milk substitutes (more commonly known as infant formula in the United States) should be marketed and distributed. The code outlines recommendations for maximizing the provision of safe nutrition for infants, protecting and promoting breastfeeding, and ensuring that breast milk substitutes are used properly. More than 160 countries around the world signed on to abide by the guidelines, which include best practices and guidance on infant formula and how public organizations (e.g. hospitals, medical offices, child care programs, food distribution sites, etc.) can support breastfeeding and breastfeeding families.

The WHO Code recommends that food distribution sites should place infant formula, as well as related feeding supplies, coupons, and promotional materials from infant formula manufacturers, out of view from clients. This will help to prevent the sites from unwittingly participating in infant formula companies' marketing practices that tend to exploit low-income and vulnerable families. Research shows that not adhering to the WHO Code and offering free infant formula samples, gifts, coupons, and promotional materials negatively impacts breastfeeding success.

How to Support Breastfeeding Families

1. Have a Written Policy or Guidelines in Place.

Written guidelines or policies help good practices and good intentions become part of an organization’s culture that will last beyond current leadership and staffing. A supportive breastfeeding friendly food pantry’s written policy should cover these elements:

- How to address infant formula donations and how to check for expiration dates and recalls.
- If formula is accepted, where it should be stored, and how it will be distributed.
- How to provide information, education, and resources to breastfeeding families, including staff and volunteers.

2. Review and Improve Practices.

- *Formula donations:* Where they come from (e.g. post office, individuals, or other), whether to accept the donations, and procedures for regularly checking for expiration dates and recalls.
- *Formula distribution:* Deciding where to place/store formula, how to let clients know about formula, how to support clients with formula needs, and providing accurate information on safe preparation and storage of formula and formula feeding practices.
- *Resources:* Offer informative breastfeeding information and resources, including information about breastfeeding basics; nutritional information for breastfeeding families; and connecting families with local community breastfeeding resources, such as WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), hospital support groups, etc.
- *Education and support:* Offer to provide breastfeeding education and peer support.
- *Cultural considerations:* Consider language, imagery, nutritional restrictions, literacy levels, and family structure.

3. Establish a Welcoming Environment.

Washington D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 47 states have laws protecting breastfeeding in public places. Refer to your own state’s breastfeeding laws to learn more about specific protections that are required of you.

- Create a welcoming environment that feels friendly, accepting, and supportive of breastfeeding families. Different families need different things – some need more privacy, and some need more affirmation. The common agreement should be that breastfeeding families (including your staff and volunteers) will NOT be discriminated against, treated disrespectfully, or asked to leave because they are breastfeeding.
- Display stickers, window clings, or signage in a visible location – and even your website – indicating that you welcome breastfeeding families in your establishment.
- Set up a semi-private or private space for your staff, volunteers, and clients to express milk or breastfeed.
- If your site accepts formula, store it in a location that’s out of view of your clients. This can help to ensure that it is distributed thoughtfully, and that information is included about safe preparation.

4. Ensure That All Staff and Volunteers Receive Proper Training.

Different volunteers and staff have different roles. Make sure that training and education is offered accordingly.

Suggested training topics that help to support breastfeeding families include:

- Why formula placement matters.
- What breastfeeding families need.
- Finding a balance that meets clients’ needs and doesn’t participate in formula companies’ marketing practices, which tend to target vulnerable populations.



Hang an educational poster in your breakroom, and educate your employees and volunteers about your commitment, policy, and practices for welcoming breastfeeding families. Regular reminders (e.g. every six months) at staff meetings or volunteer trainings can also help to keep your commitment top-of-mind. See the resource section at the end of this guide for suggested educational webinars and videos.

How Are We Doing?

Complete the following assessment to determine how your food pantry is excelling or could be improved to support breastfeeding families.

Policy

Progressing	Breastfeeding Friendly	Breastfeeding Advocate
<input type="checkbox"/> No written policy or guidelines exist on formula or supporting breastfeeding families.	<input type="checkbox"/> Have written policy or guidelines outlining how we support breastfeeding families and how we address formula donations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Written policy includes support for breastfeeding employees and volunteers.

Practices

Progressing	Breastfeeding Friendly	Breastfeeding Advocate
<input type="checkbox"/> We accept formula donations and distribute it with other food items. <input type="checkbox"/> We do not have educational materials about breastfeeding.	<input type="checkbox"/> We accept formula donations and offer them by request only. <input type="checkbox"/> We offer breastfeeding information and details about local resources. <input type="checkbox"/> We refer families to WIC for further breastfeeding and nutritional support.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have educational materials or peer support available onsite for breastfeeding families. <input type="checkbox"/> We host community breastfeeding and/or baby feeding classes onsite.

Environment

Progressing	Breastfeeding Friendly	Breastfeeding Advocate
<input type="checkbox"/> We do not have a space for breastfeeding or milk expression. <input type="checkbox"/> Formula is placed with other food items and stored openly (i.e. within sight of clients).	<input type="checkbox"/> We have signage that welcomes breastfeeding families. <input type="checkbox"/> We welcome clients to breastfeed anywhere and anytime. <input type="checkbox"/> We have a private lactation space for employees and volunteers. <input type="checkbox"/> Formula is placed out of view of clients and is available by request.	<input type="checkbox"/> We display artwork depicting breastfeeding families. <input type="checkbox"/> We have a prioritized or designated, private lactation space for employees, volunteers, <u>and</u> clients to express milk or breastfeed.

Staff and Volunteer Training

Progressing	Breastfeeding Friendly	Breastfeeding Advocate
<input type="checkbox"/> We do not offer training for employees and volunteers specific to supporting breastfeeding families.	<input type="checkbox"/> We have an educational poster or handout for employees and volunteers about our support for breastfeeding families. <input type="checkbox"/> We have an educational poster or handout for employees and volunteers about formula donations, storage/display, and distribution.	<input type="checkbox"/> We offer training for staff and volunteers about the needs of and extra support for breastfeeding families. <input type="checkbox"/> We offer training for staff and volunteers addressing formula donations, storage/display, and distribution.



Guide to Optimal Nutrition for Pregnancy/Breastfeeding

Adapted from WIC Nutrition Guides for Pregnant Women and Breastfeeding Women

No special diet is necessary to breastfeed, but a pregnant or breastfeeding person may have a higher need for some vitamins and minerals. It is best for them to eat a nutritious, balanced diet and to eat and drink to satisfy hunger and thirst. Encourage pregnant and breastfeeding individuals to speak to their health care provider or WIC staff to learn more about making healthy choices.

Drinking water regularly helps to stay hydrated and maintain a good milk supply. A breastfeeding person does not need to eat special cookies or drink teas or cow's or other animal's milk to increase their milk supply.

Food Group	Amount Per Day While Pregnant	Amount Per Day While Breastfeeding	What Counts as 1 Cup or 1 Ounce?
Vegetables	2½-3 cups	3 cups	What counts as 1 cup? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup raw, cooked, or canned vegetables • 1 cup vegetable juice • 2 cups raw, leafy vegetables
Fruit	2 cups	2 cups	What counts as 1 cup? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 small or ½ large piece of fruit • 1 cup cut fruit • 1 cup 100% fruit juice • ½ cup dried fruit
Milk	3 cups	3 cups	What counts as 1 cup? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup milk or yogurt • 1½ ounces of cheese or 2 ounces of processed cheese (e.g. American cheese) • 2 cups cottage cheese
Grain	6-8 ounces	7-8 ounces	What counts as 1 ounce? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice bread or 1 six-inch tortilla • 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal • ½ cup cooked pasta, rice, or cereal • 5-7 crackers
Meat/Protein	5½-6½ ounces	6-6½ ounces	What counts as 1 ounce? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 ounce meat, poultry, or fish • ½ cup cooked beans or peas • 1 egg • 1 tablespoon peanut butter or ½ ounce nuts



Content for Policy or Guidelines

Written guidelines or a formal policy should include the following information:

Purpose: Address why this food pantry promises to adhere to certain practices, such as ensuring pumping time and space for employees/volunteers, a semi-private space for the public, or private lactation space for employees and volunteers (or clients needing privacy), and handling formula donations and distribution in a thoughtful way. This is where the food pantry can clearly outline their values, breastfeeding support, and their role in the community.

Scope and Responsibility: Outline who is responsible for establishing and monitoring these practices and commitments to employees, volunteers, and clients.

Standards: Identify the source of and outline the standards or best practices that drive the different responsibilities and commitments in the guidelines or policy. Detail the required components of a lactation space. List the steps to take when accepting and distributing formula donations. Identify where to store formula so it is out of public view.

Communication: Identify the position or department that can answer questions or explain sections of the policy. Be specific about the content and frequency of training for staff and volunteers. Provide details about communication and education provided to clients and the general public.

Furnishing a Lactation Space



The Essentials

- Private room with a lock on door – privacy is required for employees or volunteers expressing milk
- Electrical outlet for those needing to plug in a breast pump
- Chairs – seats for the person breastfeeding/pumping and for family members
- Small side table
- Wastebasket
- Nearby sink – doesn't need to be in the same space, but should be close for washing hands and pump parts
- Nearby refrigerator or storage space for small cooler for those needing to store breastmilk
- Clear signage – the international breastfeeding symbol (above) is free to download to make custom signage
- Information rack to display flyers and pamphlets about area resources or breastfeeding tips
- Employees and volunteers should provide their own breast pumps

Resources

WIC

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federal program that supports pregnant and new families with children (up to age five years) with food assistance, referrals for health services, breastfeeding support, and nutrition education. Connecting your clients with WIC can maximize the assistance and education that they receive. Consider collaborating with your local WIC office.

- Learn more about breastfeeding and the breastfeeding support WIC provides: <https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/>
- Find a WIC office in your state, learn about eligibility, and find resources for families: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>
- Find posters and handouts to download for clients: <https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/wic-partners>

Other Referrals in the Community

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which was previously called the Food Stamp Program, provides nutrition benefits to eligible families: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>

SNAP-ED Connect offers education and demonstrations to shop for food and create healthy meals on a budget. Search for local programs: <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/>

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP) is a nutrition education program for low-income families. Search for local programs : <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/expanded-food-and-nutrition-education-program-efnep>

For more information about breastfeeding and resources, such as peer support groups or outpatient breastfeeding services, contact your local health department.

Educational Resources

Food Pantries

For ideas on how to arrange food placement to optimizing interest and likelihood that clients will make healthy choices, watch the “Supershelf” video: <https://www.supershelfmn.org/>

Breastfeeding

United States Breastfeeding Committee: <http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/>

University of Washington EthnoMed: Information about cultural beliefs, medical issues, and related topics pertinent to health and nutrition of immigrants and refugees: <https://ethnomed.org/about>

Global Health Media Project: Short videos (7-10 minutes) about breastfeeding management; filmed on three continents in multiple countries with a high level of cultural sensitivity: <https://globalhealthmedia.org>

Infant Formula Preparation

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers information about safe preparation of infant formula, which may be copied and given to families if infant formula is distributed at your site:

<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/InfantandToddlerNutrition/formula-feeding/infant-formula-preparation-and-storage.html>

The World Health Organization (WHO) offers a 12-page visual guide to safe preparation of infant formula:

https://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/micro/PIF_Bottle_en.pdf