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NEWS RELEASE

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Working and Breastfeeding

Women with infants and children below age three are the fastest growing segment of today's labor force. At least 50 percent of women who are employed when they become pregnant return to the labor force by the time their child is 3 months old.

In California, 74% of mothers choose to breastfeed by the time they leave the hospital. However, only 18% exclusively breastfeed their babies for more than eight weeks. This pattern suggests that mothers are not receiving adequate support in order to continue breastfeeding.

One of the major barriers to breastfeeding longer is work outside of the home. Many women and businesses are unaware that breastfeeding can be compatible with work. Some studies indicate that work site lactation programs can increase breastfeeding duration among working women. In one lactation program, for example, 75 percent of breastfeeding women who returned to work continued to breastfeed until their baby was 6 months old. The average duration of breastfeeding overall was 8.1 months. A few years ago a PBS "Nightly Business Report" concluded that there are three very good reasons why employers should want to accommodate and support working women who breastfeed. First, companies need women to return to work as soon as possible. Second, pediatricians agree that breastfed babies are sick less often than bottle-fed babies, as they grow older. Parents will spend less time caring for their sick children if they have been breastfed. And third, employers are investing in their future work force by supporting breastfeeding. Some studies have indicated that breastfed babies have potentially higher IQ's and better academic accomplishments than bottle-fed babies.

Women who wish to continue breastfeeding after returning to work have relatively few and simple needs. They need to have a convenient, private, and comfortable place at their work site to pump their breast milk. They need a suitable, dependable, and efficient breast pump. They need the ability to take two breaks during the work shift to pump. They need a clean, safe water source and sink for washing hands and rinsing out any breast pump equipment. And they need a refrigerator/freezer or a safe place to keep an ice chest or thermos to store the breast milk.

The milk that mothers collect while separated from their baby can be given to the baby while the mother is at work the next day (or within 3-5 days). Expressing their milk at work will continue to stimulate the mother's milk supply and avoid overly full breasts.

There are many organizations available to help employers and mothers to set up breastfeeding support at the work site. The La Leche League International publishes a pamphlet No. 83 called “Practical Hints for Working and Breastfeeding.” They can be reached at 1-800-LA-LECHE. In San Joaquin County, contact Gail Dacayanan, R.D. She is the Breastfeeding Coordinator in Public Health Services, WIC, at (209) 468-0373. The San Joaquin County Breastfeeding Coalition can also be reached at: <http://www.breastfeedingcoalition.org>.

Source: Why Breastfeeding is Best for Babies . . . and the Environment—Economic Research Service/USDA
March 2001

Practical Hints for Working and Breastfeed—La Leche League Institutional No. 83, Oct. 1991 Minimum
Conditions Needed to Support a Breastfeeding Mother in the Workplace—adapted with permission from
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