

Supporting Breastfeeding During Challenging Times: Topic of the Month

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Breastfeeding Messaging

What happens in the prenatal and postnatal period can impact exclusivity and duration, and a participant's confidence that they can and will breastfeed. WIC information and support can help empower families to have a successful breastfeeding experience. Providing positive messaging can make all the difference.

Sharing breastfeeding messaging whether in person or remotely can be challenging. Health scares and a national crisis like formula shortages add to the difficulty, but it is even more imperative during these times to provide individualized support for each family's unique situation.

Opportunities to Connect

We encourage WIC staff to approach each participant assuming they will exclusively breastfeed. Work from there to address questions and concerns, reassuring that we want to help each new baby get the best start possible and will support each individual situation and need.

It is important to start messaging early and keep it positive! We want to send the signal that we are here to support and answer any questions that may come up during the pregnancy and after baby arrives.

Pregnant Participants

Pregnancy is the first breastfeeding contact for most participants. WIC messages can start by providing information, resources, and offering support. Using participant-centered counseling skills will encourage a flowing conversation and can empower parents to successfully breastfeed.

Scenarios when parents may need support and positive messaging:

- Reinforcing the need for anticipatory guidance, "Tell me what breastfeeding support looks like for you?"
- Asking for help sooner than later. Most families don't ask for help when they first need it. "I want you to know that you can call WIC with any questions you may have. What thoughts to do you about breastfeeding right now?"
- Helping families obtain pumps, "I have information about getting a breast pump for your return to work. Would that be helpful to you?"
- Anticipatory guidance on return to work, "What are your plans for returning to work?"

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- Breastfeeding gives the families control of an uncertain situation, “WIC is here to support anyone interested in or planning to breastfeed their infant.”

Contacting parents in their last trimester

Connecting with families near the end of the pregnancy can help alleviate some of the questions and concerns they may have about feeding their new baby. Consider reaching out to families close to their delivery date to remind them to connect with WIC early for breastfeeding support to help navigate early feeding challenges.

By running the “**Participants by Cert End Date**” report, staff can identify participants nearing the end of their pregnancy.

The “Participants by Cert End Date” can be run for future months to capture certification end dates. Enter an end date less than 6 weeks from the current date to capture those in about their ninth month of pregnancy.

New Parents

New parents have a lot on their plate. Reach out proactively and follow up more frequently with families. WIC can offer support and referrals to participants with some of the tips shared below.

- Check in with all breastfeeding families sooner.
- Utilize texting, emailing, calling, and other technologies to reach out to participants who are due soon.
- Encourage parents to talk with their childcare provider about infant feeding goals.
- If bottle feeding, educate on preparing only what baby will eat to reduce milk waste.

Families that are Supplementing

Supplementation may be necessary or by choice. Whatever the reason, WIC can offer information to help parents make an informed choice.

Including some of these tips in your discussions with parents shows you are here to support them and trust they are making the best choice for their family.

- Affirm that they’re providing breastmilk, “Your baby is loving the breastmilk you are offering.”
- Pull out information on how to maintain and increase supply: Use supportive phrases, “You are doing so well with pumping; can I share how you may be able to increase your supply?”
- If the family is reducing a formula supplement, encourage to do so gradually and under the supervision of a healthcare provider to ensure baby is gaining weight appropriately.

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- Encourage families to place only the amount of breastmilk or formula that baby will eat in the bottle when venturing out or going to childcare; this will avoid losing this precious nutrition.

Relactation

Relactation may be an option for some. If a participant expresses interest, explore their situation and questions, and offer information that may support them. See [Relactation- Topic of the Month](#) for more information.

Providing Referrals

When you need to offer a referral, it can be helpful to maintain a list of resources in your community. Be sure to assess first what support the family needs, so you are able to direct parents to the appropriate resource. Consider:

- Has the family spoken to an DBE, IBCLC, or peer?
- Has the family reached out to their healthcare provider?
- Is the family open to a referral?
- What resource/referral will best support the family's need?

Collaborate with Community Partners

Collaborate with community partners to share breastfeeding support resources and strengthen referral networks. Collective coaching is available to support agencies interested in strengthening their connections with hospitals, clinics, and other partners in the community.

- Contact Rosie.Pierce-Martin@state.mn.us for more information.

Informal Milk Sharing and Homemade Formula

Some parents may ask about alternative to formula such as homemade formula or informal milk sharing. WIC can support these parents by giving them information regarding the potential risks and alternatives to support their choice.

Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) recommends to never purchase milk over the internet.

[WIC 411 Inappropriate Nutrition Practices for Infants](#) (Risk Code 411; provides relevant references in 411A, 411E, and 411I)

[Use of Donor Human Milk](#) (United States Food & Drug Administration (FDA), March 22, 2018)

[FDA Advises Parents and Caregivers to Not Make or Feed Homemade Infant Formula to Infants](#) (FDA, February 24, 2021)

Staff Breastfeeding Resources

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[Breastfeeding Promotion Module](#) (MDH WIC)

[Breastfeeding Resources for WIC Staff](#) (MDH WIC)

[A WIC Staff Resource to Support Breastfeeding Participants](#) (MDH WIC)

[Breastfeeding 101](#) (USDA)

Participant Breastfeeding Resources

[WIC Breastfeeding Resources](#) (MDH WIC)

[Breastfeeding](#) (MDH WIC Nutrition Education Cards)

[WIC Breastfeeding Support](#) (USDA)

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[Relactation- Topic of the Month](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2022/topic/0406topic.pdf)

[WIC 411 Inappropriate Nutrition Practices for Infants](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/411.html)

[FDA Advises Parents and Caregivers to Not Make or Feed Homemade Infant Formula to Infants](#)

(www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/fda-advises-parents-and-caregivers-not-make-or-feed-homemade-infant-formula-infants)

[Use of Donor Human Milk](#) (www.fda.gov/science-research/pediatrics/use-donor-human-milk)

[Breastfeeding Promotion Module](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/nutrition/nst/bfpromotion.pdf)

[Breastfeeding Resources for WIC Staff](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/bf/index.html)

[A WIC Staff Resource to Support Breastfeeding Participants](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/moyr/2020/topic/0812resource.pdf)

[Breastfeeding 101](#) (wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/breastfeeding-101)

[WIC Breastfeeding Resources](#) (www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/bf/morebflinks.html)

[Breastfeeding](#) (www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/nutrition/tips.html#bfwomen)

[WIC Breastfeeding Support](#) (wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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