

BREASTFEEDING FAMILIES WELCOME HERE!

Women in Washburn County overwhelmingly choose to breastfeed their babies. Of the pregnant women who participated recently in the WIC Program (Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program), 83% intend to breastfeed their newborn. However, maintaining mom's milk supply once she returns to work can be challenging and pumping milk during the times a mom is away from her baby can be critical. The availability of a breastfeeding room improves the chances of the working mom to succeed at breastfeeding and improve her health and her child's.

The need for lactation rooms came about from working moms who wanted a private, safe, clean place to express breast milk. It is sometimes suggested that moms use a bathroom for this purpose, but toilet areas aren't a sanitary location to pump breast milk that a baby will consume. Would any of us willingly consume food or beverages that were prepared in a public restroom?

The State WIC Office made limited funds available earlier this year for clinic improvements that would make the physical space for WIC more attractive, comfortable, welcoming and safe, more family-friendly and allow for updated breastfeeding-friendly space. The local agency, housed within the Washburn County Health Department, had for some time used an exam room as a designated breastfeeding room, but it had the sterile look and feel of office space. Some minor adjustments helped to make the room relaxing and more functional for breastfeeding moms, whether they are nursing their babies or pumping milk for them.

The room, which can be locked for the user's privacy, includes a comfortable chair, a table (near an electrical outlet) to set a pump or reading materials, low-intensity lighting, attractive artwork on the walls, and curtains and a rug to give the room a more "homey" feeling. Because this room may be used by moms to breastfeed their babies, the room is childproofed and sturdy, cleanable children's books are available to keep an older child occupied while mom nurses the baby. A sink for cleaning the breast pump is available nearby.

While some employers view a lactation room as a work-life benefit to the new working mom that can increase loyalty and productivity, it actually helps the employer as well. Research has shown that corporate lactation programs help new mothers avoid taking time off due to a sick child. The United States Breastfeeding Committee cites a 77 percent reduction in absenteeism among firms with lactation support and twice as many one-day absences among employees whose babies are not breastfed.

The breastfeeding room at Washburn County Health Department is a resource both for families who are engaged in services at the department and for employees of the department who have babies.

<https://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/worklife/mothers/>