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August 1, 2019

August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month

Communities Need to Work Together to Provide Support for Breastfeeding Mothers

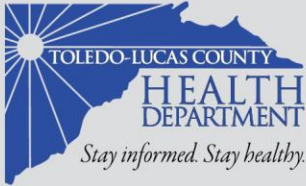
August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month in Ohio and Aug. 1-7 is World Breastfeeding Week (WBW). Research suggests that breastfeeding is a key modifiable factor for disease for both mothers and infants. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that Ohio's 2018 breastfeeding initiation rate of 81.9 percent ranks 36th in the nation. For this year's Breastfeeding Awareness Month, Ohio will adopt the theme: *Empower Families, Support Breastfeeding*. This theme focuses on the importance of supporting all members of a breastfeeding family as well as working to advocate for breastfeeding supportive environments in and around local communities.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding with the addition of appropriate solid food for the first year and beyond.

"In light of the monetary and lifesaving benefits of breastfeeding, all elements of the community, must cooperate and support breastfeeding," said Eric Zgodzinski, Lucas County Health Commissioner. "Ultimately, our whole society benefits from having healthier mothers, babies and children when breastfeeding is promoted, protected and supported."

One of the most important things businesses and the community can do is to allow mothers to feel comfortable nursing in public. Hungry babies need to eat and Ohio law (*Section 3781.55 of the Ohio Revised Code*) allows breastfeeding in public. Businesses can show their support by placing the "Breastfeeding Welcome Here" universal sign for breastfeeding in their windows and educate their staffs on the acceptance of breastfeeding in their establishments. They can also encourage their employees and provide a private space (other than a bathroom) to pump. This will increase employee retention and reduce medical costs.

Hospitals can adopt the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding* as an indication that they are dedicated to supporting new mothers who choose to breastfeed. By eliminating formula gifts to breastfeeding mothers, they send the message that they believe mothers can make enough milk to breastfeed exclusively.



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Educational institutions can support breastfeeding by presenting age appropriate education on the anatomy and physiology of the human body. Local county fairs can teach young children about how other mammals feed their young with milk that is made just for them. Child care providers and libraries can also stock children's books that show breastfeeding as a normal part of family life.

Social media can also provide support to breastfeeding mothers through Facebook and Twitter. Breastfeeding mothers can reach out through groups and chatrooms and get the support they need to feel normal in a formula feeding culture.

Breastfeeding is a personal choice, but communities play a vital role in informing and supporting a mother's decision to breastfeed her baby. Returning our communities back into a breastfeeding supportive culture will take efforts by family, friends, employers, educational institutions, hospitals and businesses.

For more information about breastfeeding in Lucas County please call the Help Me Grow Helpline at 1-800-755-GROW or the Lucas County WIC Breastfeeding Support Program at 419-213-2124.

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