



**Pacific  
Northwest**  
NATIONAL LABORATORY

# **LACTATION SUPPORT MANAGER'S GUIDE**



[MyBenefits.pnnl.gov](https://mybenefits.pnnl.gov)

# PURPOSE

This document is intended to aid PNNL managers in supporting staff members who need to express milk in the workplace. According to staff focus groups conducted by SPARK, many individuals report feeling that their concerns, values, and preferences are not considered for postpartum support at work. Staff members cite a variety of factors, such as access to facilities that meet their needs for pumping and storing milk and support from employers, managers, and colleagues, as significant challenges to expressing milk in the workplace. According to a survey of mothers in Washington, most want to breastfeed, but discontinue sooner than hoped; lacking societal and workplace support were cited as key factors limiting their ability to continue breastfeeding. As a manager at PNNL, it is your responsibility to help create an inclusive, professional work environment where all staff members can thrive. You have the opportunity to champion postpartum and lactation support in the workplace. This guide will show you how!

# POLICY

At PNNL, we are committed to solving the world's most challenging problems and answering the most elusive questions. Diversity of people and thought is part of our unique social fabric and a key to our research success. It is also a daily personal commitment and an expectation for all staff. We strive to encourage and enhance an inclusive, professional environment where everyone respects and values individual differences. Each staff member has a role to play and a responsibility to act. By providing a work environment full of respect, trust, collaboration, and cooperation, PNNL can fulfill its mission of conducting great science and fostering technological advancement. For PNNL to succeed, all staff must be able to contribute to their maximum abilities. Assuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive in their careers requires maintaining a safe, professional workplace in which every staff member can bring their whole self to work. Lactating staff members often face a unique set of challenges in the workplace. This guide supports PNNL's Non-Discrimination & Anti-Harassment Policy. PNNL is an advocate for diversity, inclusion, and [equal employment opportunities](#). Every person makes a unique contribution in establishing PNNL as a place where people can grow and succeed. Managers enable these contributions by maintaining a professional workplace environment that embraces diversity and fosters creativity and innovation. Accordingly, fairness and equity must be defining characteristics of our workplace environment.

Private and reasonable accommodations will be provided for nursing parents in accordance with the [Fair Labor Standards Act](#). The PNNL [benefits site](#) has a list of lactation rooms. Please note that some of the spaces are temporary and may change occasionally.

Section 7(r) of the Fair Labor Standards Act provides "Reasonable break time for [a staff member] to express breast milk for their nursing child for 1 year after the child's birth each time such staff member has need to express the milk." While this statutory provision applies to nonexempt staff, at PNNL, we provide this benefit for all staff, and there is no cap on the length of time a staff member can express milk for a nursing child.

## A PRIMER ON LACTATION

Lactation is the production of milk from mammary glands postpartum (the time after a baby is born). An individual lactates during the period of time they choose to feed their child breastmilk. Not all women produce milk or choose to breastfeed or pump. Milk can be fed to an infant/child through a bottle or directly from the mother while nursing. This process takes many forms and can also be referred to as the expression of milk, breastfeeding, chestfeeding, nursing, and/or pumping.

Expressing milk and working requires coordination and dedication on the parent's part and can be time consuming. The decision to breastfeed is personal, and not one that is to be debated, questioned, or commented on by others. This process can also be very stressful on a parent because they may be the sole source of food and nutrition for an infant. Working parents taking time out of their work schedules to express breastmilk are not taking unnecessary breaks or avoiding work. Rather, they are taking care of themselves and providing for their child(ren).

Supporting lactating staff members is advantageous for both the family and the work environment. Due to the beneficial properties of human milk, breastfed babies are sick at lower rates. This leads to reduction in sick time taken by parents for children's illnesses. Further, a supportive environment for lactating staff members fosters diversity and inclusion, leading to the retention of experienced staff. Long term, this reduces the cost of recruiting and training new staff. Lactating parents should provide their line manager with reasonable advance notice when requesting accommodations, otherwise delays may occur.



## NEED HELP?

If you need help understanding this document or would like to have a conversation about the content, please contact the [Equal Employment Opportunity & Diversity](#) manager.

## LACTATION ROOMS

A current list of lactation rooms is available on the [benefits site](#), where lactation spaces can also be reserved. Access to lactation spaces may be controlled via cipher locks (e.g., Trilogy, OmniLock). If these locations are not convenient, another room can be made available through line managers, the [Human Resources Solutions Center](#), the [disabilities and leave specialist](#), or a [Human Resources Strategic Partner](#).

# GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

As a manager, your role is to support lactating staff members by:

- ▶ *Informing the staff member of PNNL's policies.*
- ▶ *Facilitating a seamless return to work after parental leave.*
- ▶ *Assuring that the staff member receives no retaliation or discrimination as a result of this decision. This includes communicating with the staff member about their anticipated needs when returning to work, confirming that the staff member has a secure and sanitary place to pump at work with the appropriate amenities, and providing reasonable and flexible scheduling to accommodate the time needed to pump during the workday.*
- ▶ *It is your responsibility to assure that the staff member's decision to nurse their child and/or express milk at work is not open for comment or discussion by coworkers or others; this is a personal and private situation and any questions or concerns are to be brought directly to the manager.*

## YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A MANAGER

### Educate yourself

- ▶ *Know PNNL's policy.*
- ▶ *Engage with the [HR Solutions Center](#), the [disabilities and leave specialist](#), or a [Human Resources Strategic Partner](#) as soon as you are aware of the staff member's need to express milk in the workplace so they can assure you and the staff member receive the appropriate resources.*
- ▶ *Check out [SPARK's "Lactation Rooms at PNNL"](#) to learn more about what makes acceptable and superb lactation spaces. Confirm that the lactation room the staff member will use is up to standard. This is another opportunity to advocate on behalf of your team member's needs.*
- ▶ *Use PNNL's [Parental Leave Brochure](#) as a resource.*
- ▶ *No two maternity and postpartum experiences are the same. There is no single solution, and it will be critical to listen to the staff member's communicated needs.*



## Be supportive

- ▶ *Talk to your staff member about their needs and support them as needed.*
- ▶ *Make it clear that you and HR are available to handle any issues that may arise.*
- ▶ *Remember that the staff member is there to work: make sure that opportunities are maintained and made available as they navigate their return from parental leave. It is not acceptable to leave them out or not consider them for opportunities, projects, meetings, etc. because of your perception that their pumping schedule will conflict.*
- ▶ *Make a plan before the staff member returns from parental leave, establish a location where the staff member will express and store milk as needed.*
- ▶ *Be cognizant about the language you use, follow the staff member's lead, and use their preferred terminology. For example, although both men and women have breast tissue, the word "breast" is most often associated with women. Transgender men may prefer referring to their "chest" and "chestfeeding" rather than "breastfeeding," which can result in severe gender dysphoria. (See [PNNL's Support for Transgender Staff Guides for more information.](#))*
- ▶ *Be flexible and understand that the staff member's needs may change over time.*

## Confidentiality and Sensitivity

If you oversee, manage, supervise, or lead a staff member who is expressing milk at work, it is important to show understanding and use a sensitive approach to their needs and concerns. It may be difficult or uncomfortable for this individual to make themselves vulnerable to people in a position of power when discussing something so personal. Make it clear that you will hold your conversations in confidence. Let them lead the conversation, particularly in terms of the support they need. Voice any questions and concerns you might have.

## Things to Remember

- ▶ *Every experience with pumping and expressing milk is unique to the individual.*
- ▶ *The decision to express milk in the workplace is a personal one. Please remember to exercise discretion and confidentiality as appropriate.*
- ▶ *Human milk is food for infants and must be handled and stored in safe, sanitary conditions.*
- ▶ *It is important that the staff member feels safe and comfortable in the designated lactation space and is also supported by the employer. Physical discomfort and emotional stress can greatly affect the ability to properly produce and express milk.*
- ▶ *Speak up about supporting lactating parents—managerial support goes a long way in creating and encouraging an inclusive environment. As a manager, you may have the ability to influence decisions about lactation spaces, approaches, and policies.*



# MYTHS & TRUTHS ABOUT PUMPING

**Myth:** Pumping only takes a few minutes.

**Truth:** The process of expressing milk differs for every individual. A pumping session can last from 15 to 45 minutes or more. It is important to note that there is a setup and clean-up process required each time a person pumps, including confirming a sanitary environment.

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**Myth:** Every mother breastfeeds.

**Truth:** Breastfeeding an infant is a personal decision. No assumption should be made about whether a staff member will require lactation accommodations at work. However, as a manager, it is your responsibility to confirm if lactation accommodations are required well in advance of the staff member's first day back to work.

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**Myth:** There are no negative impacts of not expressing milk.

**Truth:** Infrequent or delayed expression of milk may result in several adverse conditions. At minimum, this can be uncomfortable and even painful for the lactating individual. More serious conditions including clogged milk ducts, mastitis (infections), and abscesses can result in addition to reduced milk production. Providing accommodation to express milk are essential to employee health and well-being.

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**Myth:** Staff members only need to pump at work for a few months.

**Truth:** Duration of pumping varies for each parent-child pair. This can be a few months to a year or more. As a manager, no assumption can be made regarding the time frame needed for the staff member's accommodation.

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**Myth:** Only cisgender mothers are in need of lactation spaces.

**Truth:** Transgender people, and non-binary and genderqueer individuals, are physiologically capable of breast or chestfeeding, even if they have had previous gender-affirming surgery or have never given birth and are thus in need of lactation spaces.

## More to Know About Breastfeeding

- ▶ *Breastfeeding is one of the most important contributors to infant health. The World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that babies exclusively consume breast milk for the first six months of their lives, at a minimum. Note that parents may choose to breastfeed longer than this.*
- ▶ *Human milk provides a range of benefits for the infant's growth, immunity, and development.*
- ▶ *Breastfeeding improves maternal health and contributes economic benefits to the family, health care system, and workplace.*
- ▶ *Employers benefit when their staff members breastfeed.*
  - *Breastfed infants are sick less often; thus, parental absenteeism from work is lower in companies with established lactation programs.*
  - *Staff member medical costs are lower, and staff productivity is higher.*
  - *Staff retention is improved. Parents who want to breastfeed are more likely to return to a workplace that provides a supportive breastfeeding environment. Long term, this reduces the cost of recruiting and training for new staff.*
  - *Breastfeeding individuals with supportive work environments are more productive and have higher morale and company loyalty.*
  - *Support for nursing parents improves a company's reputation and is considered a benefit for staff members.*

## REFERENCES

Centers for Disease Control. Support for Breastfeeding in the Workplace. Available online at: [www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/pdf/bf\\_guide\\_2.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/pdf/bf_guide_2.pdf)

Harvard Business Review. How Companies Can Support Breastfeeding Employees. Available online at: [hbr.org/2019/04/how-companies-can-support-breastfeeding-employees](http://hbr.org/2019/04/how-companies-can-support-breastfeeding-employees)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Business Case for Breastfeeding. Available online at: <https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-home-work-and-public/breastfeeding-and-going-back-work/business-case>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Office of Women's Health. What employers need to know. Available online at: [www.womenshealth.gov/supporting-nursing-moms-work](http://www.womenshealth.gov/supporting-nursing-moms-work)

Washington State Legislature. RCW 43.70.640. Available online at: [apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.70.640](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.70.640)

Being a parent to a little and working is hard. I remember returning to work when my daughter was 3 months old and stressing about how I was going to continue to bond, make sure she had the proper nutrition, and that I wasn't missing major milestones. When parents return to work, the workplace is better. PNNL supports working parents and we are committed to supporting staff any way we can. We are providing this guide as a resource so that you can support lactating staff as they return to work. Please be empathetic as we know parents are dealing with a lot when they return to work and I am proud that they chose us. Let's show them they made the right choice.

**AWC**

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