

World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August

Support for mothers' breastfeeding can benefit employers' bottom line

PAHO/WHO recommends measures including paid maternity leave, flexible and reduced work hours, and accommodations to make breastfeeding easy at work

Washington, D.C., 31 July 2015 (PAHO/WHO) – Employers who support breastfeeding by their female employees are not only taking the ethical high road, they are likely to reap benefits for their businesses and their countries' economies, said experts at the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization in the lead-up to World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2015.

“The benefits of breastfeeding extend to mother and baby, and promoting breastfeeding policies in the workplace is essential,” said Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, Director of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO). “Employers also stand to benefit as it leads to happier, more dependable and productive employees.”

The theme of World Breastfeeding Week 2015 is “Breastfeeding and Work: Let’s make it work!” The campaign highlights the need to support women in balancing work and family and especially to breastfeed their babies according to public health recommendations.

PAHO/WHO recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life, followed by breastfeeding and appropriate complementary foods for two years or more. These recommendations are based on research that demonstrates health benefits from breastfeeding that range from reduced infections and improved IQ in babies to lower risk of breast and ovarian cancer in mothers.

Studies also show that promoting breastfeeding in the workplace produces benefits for employers, including:

- Greater employee loyalty to companies as a result of gratitude and satisfaction;
- Reduced absenteeism because breastfeeding employees' babies get sick less often and less severely;
- Retention of employees, reducing the need for training and the loss of qualified personnel; and
- Improved productivity.

To support breastfeeding, PAHO/WHO recommends that employers implement policies including paid maternity leave, paid breaks for breastfeeding, a dedicated room for breastfeeding in the workplace that is private and hygienic, and flexible or reduced working hours for breastfeeding mothers.

In addition to urging employers to adopt these policies, PAHO/WHO experts advise that governments should play a role by implementing maternity protection legislation and related measures consistent with the International Labor Organization's 2000 Maternity Protection Convention. It calls for at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave for new mothers as well as breastfeeding breaks and facilities in the workplace. Although only 29 countries globally (in the Americas, only Belize and Cuba) have ratified the 2000 convention, many more countries have implemented provisions of two earlier ILO conventions on maternity protection.

In the Americas, Chile "has established the gold standard," said Dr. Chessa Lutter, PAHO/WHO senior advisor in food and nutrition, by legally requiring six months of paid maternity leave for working mothers, the period of time recommended by PAHO/WHO for babies to be exclusively breastfed. To date, Chile is the only country in the Americas to legally mandate this.

"Many countries have made progress in this area, with legislation and policies that support working mothers to breastfeed," said Lutter. "But a lot needs to be done to ensure implementation and enforcement, and countries that do not yet have such legislation really need to begin working on it."

A musical tribute to mother's milk

Popular Honduran singer-songwriter Guillermo Anderson has joined PAHO/WHO in producing a music video in support of World Breastfeeding Week 2015. Honduran First Lady Ana García de Hernández will officially launch the new video, "A la leche materna" (To Mother's Milk), on Aug. 3 along with Minister of Health Yolani Batres, Minister of Labor Carlos Madero, and PAHO/WHO Representative Ana Treasure, from the Presidential House in Tegucigalpa.

Anderson, one of Honduras's best-known artists, is known for songs that celebrate his country's natural beauty and also touch on important social and environmental issues. He is from La Ceiba, where the music video was filmed in June.

The video and a bonus feature about its filming can be viewed here: Music Video "A la leche materna" (To Mother's Milk) https://youtu.be/zKBEGESv_4; Behind the Scenes <https://youtu.be/BtOIMRYmDBc>.

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve their populations' health and quality of life. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the WHO Regional Office for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.

Photo: PAHO/WHO, S. Mey-Schmidt, La Ceiba, Honduras

Links

World Breastfeeding Week 2015 (PAHO)
www.paho.org/wbw

Music Video “A la leche materna” *To Mother’s Milk* ” (official launch August 3, Honduras)

https://youtu.be/zKBEGESv_4 and

Music Video “A la leche maternal “Behind the Scenes

<https://youtu.be/BtOIMRYmDBc>

World Breastfeeding Week 2015 website

<http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org>

WBFW 2015 action folder

<http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/pdf/wbw2015-af-eng.pdf>

www.paho.org

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