



## About the Author:

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## Step up for Breastfeeding: Educate and Support

Every year, Ohio celebrates August as Breastfeeding Awareness Month. This year's theme is all about "stepping up" to support and educate the public about breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding is the normal and most healthy feeding option for both mothers and babies. Babies who are breastfed have a lower risk of many health issues, such as ear infections, asthma, colds, stomach problems, eczema, obesity, type 2 diabetes, leukemia, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Parents who breastfeed their babies have a lower risk of ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, and high blood pressure.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says that babies should only have breastmilk for the first 6 months of life. Babies should keep breastfeeding, in addition to eating solid foods, for at least 2 years. And yet, breastfeeding rates remain low. A 2018 report showed that less than a quarter of Ohio's infants (23.1%) were exclusively breastfed at 6 months. Only 31% of Ohio infants were still breastfeeding at 12 months. Why are so few infants breastfed according to the AAP's recommendations?

Sometimes health issues can affect breastfeeding, such as prematurity. Many mothers stop breastfeeding because they think they don't make enough milk or they can't get help if breastfeeding is painful. Many mothers stop breastfeeding because they must return to work too soon after their babies are born and can't maintain their milk supply. There are countless other barriers to breastfeeding, such as the lack of support or education from healthcare workers, lack of support from family, friends or the public, or the prevalence of breastfeeding myths.

We all need to step up and remove these barriers to breastfeeding so more families can receive the health benefits of breastfeeding. Partners and families can learn about breastfeeding and encourage the mother. They can also be sure that the mother receives skilled help when she needs it with issues like pain or low milk supply. Workplaces can offer paid family leave and flexible work options so mothers can be with their babies, as well as encouraging mothers to take frequent pumping breaks to provide milk for their babies. Communities can support and encourage mothers to nurse in public in whatever way they are most comfortable, with or without a cover. Policy makers can create stronger laws that provide paid family leave, that protect mothers' rights to nurse their babies in public, and to pump at work.

Clermont County WIC works hard to step up for our breastfeeding families. We educate pregnant participants on breastfeeding and help them set goals for feeding their babies. We provide support to WIC moms who are breastfeeding in person, over the phone and through text message. We help participants obtain pumps and give them information about their rights to nurse in public and pump at work. We offer virtual breastfeeding classes that are open to the public. We also promote Ohio's 24 hour Breastfeeding Hotline, which provides breastfeeding support every day of the year through phone call or text.

Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed babies, so let's all step up and help every family to reach their breastfeeding goals! For information on Ohio's 24 hour breastfeeding hotline: [bit.ly/24hrBfgHelp](http://bit.ly/24hrBfgHelp)