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August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month in Ohio!

City of Middletown Health Department (CMHD) – August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month in Ohio and Aug. 1-7 is World Breastfeeding Week (WBW). The last week in August is celebrated as Black Breastfeeding Week. Research suggests that breastfeeding is a key factor in determining risk of disease for both mothers and infants- including respiratory illness, ear infections, allergies, and some cancers. For this year’s Breastfeeding Awareness Month, Ohio will adopt the theme “Support Breastfeeding for a Healthier Planet.” **This theme focuses on the impact of infant feeding on the environment/climate change and the imperative to protect, promote and support breastfeeding for the health of the planet and its people.**

To help raise awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted have signed a [proclamation](#) naming August Ohio Breastfeeding Awareness Month.

Breastfeeding is a personal choice, but communities play a vital role in informing and supporting a mother’s decision to breastfeed her baby. 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. The Ohio Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program helps provide [breastfeeding support](#) to Ohio families and health professionals across the state.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that Ohio’s 2018 breastfeeding initiation rate of 81.9 percent ranks 36th in the nation. The CDC also states that rates of breastfeeding duration and exclusivity are lower among Black infants than among white infants. The CDC believes increasing rates of breastfeeding initiation and supporting continuation of breastfeeding among Black women might help reduce disparities in breastfeeding duration.

“Breastfeeding provides babies with the most beneficial food in the first year of life,” says Dr. Mary Kate Francis, Interim Medical Director at the Ohio Department of Health. “Breast milk contains antibodies that boost a

babies' immune system to help fight illness caused by viruses and bacteria such as ear infections, diarrhea and respiratory illness, and also protects against allergies. The benefits of breast-feeding do not end with baby but are also conferred to mother in releasing hormones that help with changes in mother's body after delivery, burning calories and reducing risk of uterine and breast cancer."

One of the most important things businesses and communities can do is to help mothers 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 a "[Breastfed Babies Welcome Here](#)" or universal sign for breastfeeding in their windows and educate their staff about 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.

For more information about breastfeeding, Ohioans can text keyword localwic + your zip code to 67076 or visit www.signupwic.com/local. You can also reach out to the Appalachian Breastfeeding Network Breastfeeding Helpline at 1-888-588-3423.

