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## Missoula Promotes Breastfeeding for Healthy, Well-Nourished Kids

Among childhood health experts, there is universal agreement on two recommendations for infant feeding. First, that any amount of breastfeeding is good for both mother and baby. Second, that maintaining breastfeeding for as long as possible during the first year provides numerous benefits for lifelong health. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies be breastfed exclusively - with no baby formula or added foods or beverages - for the first six months of life.

"The Missoula City-County Health Department has made a strong commitment to breastfeeding," says Mary Pittaway, MA, RD (registered dietitian), Nutrition Services Supervisor. "Through our WIC Program and other services, we provide comprehensive support and information for families who want to give their children the best nutritional start in life. Our services include a Breastfeeding Help-Line at 406-203-4753, lactation specialists for office and home consultations, and free breast pumps for WIC participants."

With these services, Missoula has raised the rate of exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months among WIC mothers from 3% to 18%. According to CDC's 2011 Breastfeeding Report Card, Montana's overall infant feeding practices are mostly right on target with Healthy People 2020 goals. In Montana, nearly 82% of new mothers begin breastfeeding, about 61% are breastfeeding at six months, and 28% breastfeed for 12 months. The last number is the only one that falls short of the goal of 34% of mothers breastfeeding for a year.

"Breastfeeding success depends on many factors," explains Pittaway. "Support from family and health care providers is obviously critically important. However, employer practices are also key, since at least 58% of women who are employed when they become pregnant return to the labor force by the time their child is three months old. Montana is fortunate to have legislation that requires employers to provide a private space and break time for nursing mothers, as well as an exemption from jury duty."

The Surgeon General Regina Benjamin's 2011 *Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding* outlines ways for everyone to help. Here are some positive strategies for you to take local action:

- **As friends:** Encourage pregnant women to discuss their desire and plans to breastfeed with family members, health care providers, childcare workers, and employers. Help them find accurate information.
- **As health care providers:** Educate pregnant women and new mothers about the physical, economic, and emotional reasons to begin and continue breastfeeding. Educate all staff to offer support and information.
- **As employers:** Ensure that your business complies with Montana Code by providing comfortable, private places for nursing mothers to express breast milk and adequate storage space for expressed milk. Display a certificate announcing your commitment to be a breastfeeding friendly work site.

"The Missoula Health Services website provides comprehensive links and resources," Pittaway notes. "You can find everything you need to know at [www.co.missoula.mt.us/healthservices/EatSmart/breastfeed.htm](http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/healthservices/EatSmart/breastfeed.htm)."

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)