

Our Mission: Providing quality services through responsible leadership, innovation and the cooperation of dedicated people

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Washington County WIC celebrates World Breastfeeding Week

With the world in the midst of a global pandemic, it is a good time to recognize the important role breastfeeding plays in protecting babies from germs all across the planet.

The Washington County WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program is celebrating Minnesota Breastfeeding Awareness Month throughout August. The theme for World Breastfeeding Week, Aug. 1-7, is "Support breastfeeding for healthier families, healthier communities, healthier planet." The theme for Black Breastfeeding Week, Aug. 25-31, is "Revive, Restore, Reclaim."

As the world's leading scientists race to find a COVID-19 vaccine, humans have their own, natural way of protecting the next generation. Moms, through breast milk, pass on helpful antibodies that fight germs.

Though it is too early to know for sure, researchers are finding evidence that moms who previously had COVID-19 may pass on helpful antibodies that can fight the virus. Parents may worry about the safety of breastfeeding during the pandemic. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends breastfeeding. The benefits simply outweigh the potential risk of spreading the virus to the baby. In addition, researchers have not found the infectious virus in breastmilk. Even when a mother has COVID-19, she is advised to still breastfeed while doing hand hygiene and wearing a mask when with baby.

Promoting and removing barriers to breastfeeding for people of color is one way to address structural racism in Minnesota. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Black, people of color, and American Indians in Minnesota due to underlying social, economic, and health disparities. These same underlying factors have made it more difficult over the years for Minnesotans of color to breastfeed.

Supporting breastfeeding through culturally appropriate care increases initiation and duration rates across all racial and cultural groups.

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The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative has reduced racial disparities in breastfeeding rates. The Minnesota Department of Health recognizes maternity centers that have taken steps toward implementing breastfeeding friendly practices through the Minnesota Breastfeeding Friendly Maternity Center Designation Program.

“The pandemic has illuminated the many ways health is interconnected,” said Samantha O’Dell, WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator. “Given all we face in 2020, let’s not forget to promote breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is one of these pathways to health, right at the start of life, with far reaching benefits for families, communities, and the planet.”

Washington County WIC continues to be open for business and breastfeeding support, but is operating remotely at this time. For more information, call Washington County WIC at 651-430-6658.