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August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month

Communities Can Work Together to Provide Support for Breastfeeding Mothers

Lancaster, OH: August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month, and World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) will be celebrated Aug. 1-7 this year. Breastfeeding has many known health benefits for mother and baby and is widely accepted as an effective strategy to promote positive health outcomes for both mothers and their babies.

Research suggests that breastfeeding is a key factor in reducing risk of disease for both mothers and infants, including respiratory illness, ear infections, allergies, and some cancers. A woman's early experience with breastfeeding can affect whether and how long she continues to breastfeed and providing support at every level can help reduce barriers to breastfeeding.

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. For this year's Breastfeeding Awareness Month, Ohio will adopt the theme "Protect Breastfeeding: A Shared Responsibility." This theme focuses on how breastfeeding contributes to the survival, health and well-being of all, and the work to protect breastfeeding worldwide.

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.

One of the most important ways businesses and communities can support this work 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 help increase employee retention and reduce medical costs. Hospitals also 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 call Ohio Statewide Breastfeeding Hotline at 1-888-588-3423 or by calling Fairfield County's WIC clinic at 740-652-2800.