

Becoming a breastfeeding friendly place

A step-by-step guide

Adapted with permission from
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit





Why welcome breastfeeding?

It's a human right

The *Ontario Human Rights Code* clearly states that women have the right to breastfeed, undisturbed in any public place in Ontario. It notes that women should not be asked to “cover up” or move to a more “discreet” area.

By welcoming breastfeeding families, your organization will:

- Publicly acknowledge the rights of breastfeeding families
- Attract young families to your facilities
- Align your organization with the promotion of health and wellness

Why is breastfeeding important?

It creates healthy children and healthy moms

Children who are breastfed get sick less often. They have a decreased risk of:

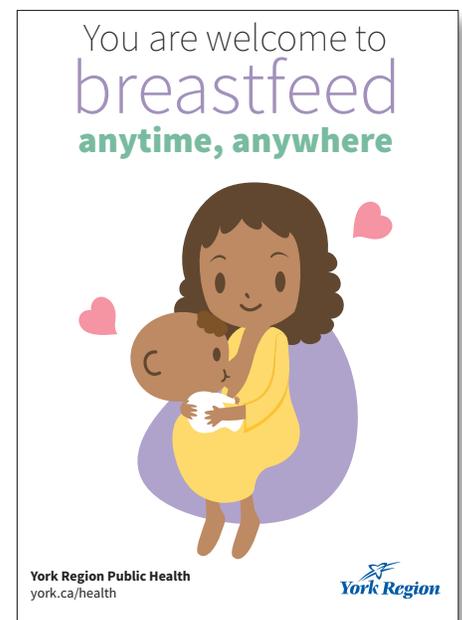
- Ear, chest and stomach infections
- Certain childhood cancers such as leukemia
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Obesity and diabetes

Breastfeeding mothers have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

It creates healthy communities

- Breastfeeding is environmentally friendly; it imposes no risk to the environment in terms of production, packaging or waste disposal
- It works for businesses. Research shows parents of breastfed children take less time off work to care for sick children
- Breastfed children spend less time at the doctor or in emergency rooms with infections and illnesses, saving the health care system valuable dollars
- Breastfeeding saves a family money, possibly creating less strain on a family's budget

By supporting and welcoming breastfeeding families on your premise, you are joining many other businesses, organizations and municipalities that have made a commitment to promote a healthy community.



Sample of York Region Public Health breastfeeding decal

Take action

What can I do?

All parents have the right to breastfeed their child in a public area. The checklist below and steps on the next page show you ways to welcome breastfeeding families.

★ Breastfeeding friendly places checklist

- Our staff are aware that the right to breastfeed a child in a public area is protected under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*
- Our staff understand how they can support parents to feel comfortable breastfeeding
- We are working on or have established breastfeeding friendly places policies, guidelines and training
- We display the *York Region Public Health* “You are welcome to breastfeed anytime, anywhere” decal or other breastfeeding friendly resources within our premises
- We understand that some parents prefer privacy when breastfeeding and will support requests for privacy whenever possible, including having a place for parents to sit
- We are working on or have established practices or policies to support breastfeeding employees

To request assistance in becoming a breastfeeding friendly place, to order decals and resources or for other inquiries about supporting breastfeeding, please call *York Region Health Connection* 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-512-6228 or visit york.ca/breastfeeding for more information.



Step 1: Inform your staff

Well informed staff are critical to creating a breastfeeding friendly place. Clear guidelines or policies create clear expectations.

Here are some ways to make sure your staff are well informed:

- Inform your staff of any breastfeeding friendly places policies, training and guidelines
- Post a copy of the **Policy** and **Staff Tips** where employees will see it (see pages 5 and 6)
- Share a copy of this guide with staff and discuss ways that staff can support breastfeeding in your premise
- Inform all new staff that your establishment welcomes breastfeeding families and keep track of staff who have received information. Keep a copy of the policy with your staff orientation material

Step 2: Inform families

- Display “You are welcome to breastfeed anytime, any where” decals where everyone can see them. Don’t have one? Call York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-512-6228 to request one
- If families request a private place to feed their child or express milk, have staff direct them to a quiet area appropriate for eating, that offers privacy. This should never be a washroom
- If you have one, make sure you promote that there is a place for parent to change their child’s diaper

Step 3: Inform the general public

- Advertise that you are a breastfeeding friendly place by downloading an electronic version of the breastfeeding friendly decal and other resources are available for download on our website at york.ca/breastfeeding

Remember:

Workplaces must also support breastfeeding employees to stay in compliance with the law.

The *Ontario Human Rights Commission* states, “Women cannot be discriminated against in any way because they have chosen to breastfeed.” The employee and the employer need to collaborate on the arrangements to permit the mother to breastfeed upon her return to work. “Employees who require breaks, such as for pumping or breastfeeding, should normally be accorded those breaks, and not be asked to forgo normal meal breaks as a result, or work additional time to make up for the breaks, unless the employer can show undue hardship.”

Implementing a breastfeeding friendly place policy

Having a breastfeeding policy is an effective way to make sure all staff are aware that your premise supports breastfeeding.

For your convenience, please fill in the template and post in a visible area. You can use this policy as is, or can incorporate into other existing policies.

Breastfeeding friendly policy

Policy No. _____

Date Approved: _____.

_____ supports breastfeeding parents and the right to breastfeed undisturbed in public places.

Purpose

To support visiting breastfeeding parents to breastfeed within _____ and to provide the conditions (time, space and support) necessary to facilitate breastfeeding.

Definitions

Breastfeeding- includes pumping or expressing milk, as well as nursing directly from the breast.

Public- any visitor to _____.

Public place- refers to any area in the premise where customers, clients, visitors are permitted.

Application

_____ promotes and supports breastfeeding and the expression of breastmilk by members of the public when they are visitors to our premise.

Upon request, staff will provide assistance to visitors who wish to breastfeed their child by providing a location comfortable to both child and parent, where space is available. Pursuant to the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, staff will not disturb breastfeeding parents, ask them to “cover up,” or move to another area that is more “discreet.”

If a member of staff feels they need more guidance on this they should speak to _____.

Staff tips for creating a breastfeeding friendly place

Staff can help breastfeeding families feel more comfortable when they:

- Allow the family to breastfeed undisturbed
- Make eye contact with a breastfeeding parent
- Talk to the breastfeeding parent in a comfortable manner
- Accommodate a breastfeeding parent's request for a place to sit and allow them to choose a place where they will be comfortable breastfeeding
- Accommodate a parent's request for privacy. If available, direct them to a designated breastfeeding location or an area that is more private
- Note that washrooms are not a suitable place for anyone to eat, including a breastfeeding child. While encouraged, business participation does not require that a private location be provided on site
- Be supportive of coworkers who are breastfeeding

If a customer expresses a concern about a breastfeeding family, staff are encouraged to:

- Explain that your business is a breastfeeding friendly place and it is your practice/policy to welcome breastfeeding families
- Explain that the *Ontario Human Rights Code* protects the right to breastfeed in public areas regardless of the age of the child. It specifies that a parent should not be disturbed by being asked to stop, "cover up" or asked to move to an area that is more "discreet"
- Offer to make other accommodations to help the customer be more comfortable, instead of disturbing the breastfeeding parent





Frequently asked questions

What is a breastfeeding friendly place?

A breastfeeding friendly place is one where breastfeeding parents feel welcomed and accepted. Employees are aware of and support the human right to breastfeed a child in a public area.

What is a breastfeeding friendly decal?

This decal depicts a mother breastfeeding her child, and reads “You are welcome to breastfeed anytime, anywhere”. They can be printed from york.ca/breastfeeding and posted, or ordered as a peel and stick decal by calling York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-512-6228. By placing the decal(s) in areas frequented by the public, you are announcing that your organization and staff respect and support the rights of breastfeeding families.

What rights do parents have to breastfeed in public?

The *Ontario Human Rights Code* is a law that gives parents the right to breastfeed their child in a public area. No one should prevent parents from breastfeeding their child simply because they are in public. They should not be asked to “cover up,” be disturbed or asked to move to another area that is more “discreet.”

Why can't parents just breastfeed before they leave home or feed their child with a bottle?

Children often eat on an irregular schedule and it's important to feed them when they are hungry. Breastfeeding for up to two years and beyond is encouraged by global recommendations and families are supported by law to breastfeed their child in public areas.

How should you respond if other patrons complain?

One option might be, “I hear that you're uncomfortable; however, our policy is to welcome breastfeeding within our premise as the *Ontario Human Rights Code* protects breastfeeding in public. Is there something I can do to help you feel more comfortable?”

Who should I contact for more information?

Call *York Region Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-512-6228 or **visit york.ca/breastfeeding**



Community and Health Services
Public Health

york.ca