

October 2, 2000

BREASTFEEDING: IT'S YOUR RIGHT

Toronto Public Health – Toronto Public Health celebrates World Breastfeeding Week from October 1-7. This year's theme is Breastfeeding: It's Your Right! These rights include: the right of women to breastfeed whenever and wherever their babies are in need; a mother's right to make an informed choice on how to feed her infant; and, the right of children to the best security and nourishment their parents are capable of providing.

Dr. Sheela Basrur, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health says, "Toronto Public Health supports the right of mothers to breastfeed their babies anytime, anywhere because breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for mothers and babies."

Do you know your breastfeeding rights? Women have the right to breastfeed anywhere, whether at home, at work, or in public and the right to be supported by society in this decision. The Ontario Human Rights Commission released a policy in 1999 protecting women from discrimination during pregnancy and breastfeeding. All children have the right to adequate food and nutrition to ensure healthy development from birth. Ideally this means only breastmilk for the first six months and, breastmilk together with other foods for two years and beyond. Women require correct information and support to be able to breastfeed rather than overwhelming advertising about breastfeeding substitutes. Good prenatal care and mother and baby-friendly health facilities also support women's right to breastfeed.

What should you do if you are asked to stop breastfeeding? Here are some suggestions. If you are asked to leave a public place because you are breastfeeding, do whatever you need to do to ensure your child can feed comfortably. If you would be more comfortable leaving, leave. Then follow up later, when your baby is fed. Speak to the manager and explain your rights to feed your child. Be firm but polite. Follow up with a letter. If you were satisfied with how the situation was handled, say so! Appreciation can go a long way to building good will. If you were not satisfied, include a reminder that women and children have the right to breastfeed in public places. Suggest they contact the Ontario Human Rights Commission at **416-326-9511** for information.

Consider filing a human rights complaint. Take notes: where you were, what happened, when it happened, whom you spoke to, what was said. You will need this information if you file a human rights complaint. If you feel comfortable, approach the media with your story. Remember -- you and your child have the right to breastfeed wherever you are. By speaking up, you're helping all mothers and children by making your community more breastfeeding friendly.

Toronto Public Health provides support and information for breastfeeding through prenatal classes, home visits, parenting groups and return-to-work groups. Call Toronto Public Health's, **Toronto Health Connection** at **416-338-7600** to find out more about these services.

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