

Breastfeeding Exclusively: One Feeding at a Time

Breastfeeding can be challenging. Families do the best they can to love and care for their babies. Balancing work, school, family, life and breastfeeding takes commitment and a supportive community. Sometimes, the systems families interact with (healthcare providers, childcare, employers) make it difficult to exclusively breastfeed and black families face unique, additional barriers. The lack of adequate promotional and educational efforts about the benefits of breastfeeding results in a decrease in breastfeeding rates in those communities. The breastfeeding statistics for black women and their infants expose some of the challenges. Black infants are 21% less likely to have ever been breastfed than any other race (CDC).

For every 1000 babies born in Michigan, about seven die by age one and among black babies, that number is *more than* double. Black infants have the highest infant death rates compared to other races and ethnicities in Michigan. The support of breastfeeding among families of color can help reduce these disparities. The *American Academy of Pediatrics* states, "Given the documented short- and long-term medical and neurodevelopmental advantages of breastfeeding, infant nutrition should be considered a public health issue and not only a lifestyle choice." The *American Academy of Family Physicians* "...recommends that all babies, with rare exceptions, be breastfed and/or receive expressed human milk exclusively for the first six months of life." All babies who are breastfed receive immunities, but the greatest immunity occurs when a baby is *exclusively* breastfed.

To support breastfeeding in your community, help recognize National Breastfeeding Awareness Month (August) and Black Breastfeeding Week (August 25-31). According to Governor Whitmer in her Black Mothers Breastfeeding Week Proclamation, Michigan is dedicated to expanding public understanding of the critical impact breastfeeding has on improving the health of infants and mothers and reducing infant mortality rates within the black community.

Each and every drop of breast milk provided to babies makes a difference. One feeding at a time.