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For immediate release

## National Breastfeeding Month: Lactation counselors support every parent's journey

The Minnesota Department of Health says it on its website: *Breastfeeding is natural.*

But for some moms, breastfeeding doesn't come naturally -- or easily. That's where Rice County Public Health's lactation counselors can step in, offering advice, encouragement and support to moms who feel stressed or overwhelmed, or who have questions about nursing their baby.

"Breastfeeding and pumping support has been very beneficial for me," says one of Public Health's current clients, Annabelle. "As a first-time mom, I was unsure when I came home if I was doing things correctly, and with the support I was given from my home-visiting nurse, I felt more confident and motivated to keep going and to believe in myself. At six months, I am still feeding my daughter breastmilk."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends babies be breastfed exclusively for about the first six months "with continued breastfeeding while introducing appropriate complementary foods for a year or longer."



Certified Lactation Counselors Breanna Macheel, Kathy Neirby, Supervisor Fae Schumacher, Kiera LaRoche and Heather Luethje assist moms who have questions or concerns about nursing their babies. (Rice County photo)

The benefits of breastfeeding for babies includes reduced risk of asthma, obesity, Type 1 diabetes, ear infections, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), severe lower respiratory disease and gastrointestinal infections (diarrhea/vomiting), and a decreased likelihood of necrotizing enterocolitis, a life-threatening intestinal inflammation.

Moms who breastfeed are less likely to have high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, and ovarian and breast cancer.

The team's five members -- Breanna Macheel, Kathy Neirby, Kiera LaRoche, Heather Luethje and Supervisor Fae Schumacher -- are certified lactation counselors. Macheel, LaRoche, Luethje and Schumacher are nurses within the Family Child Health Unit. Neirby is a dietitian and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) coordinator. All staff in the Family Child Health and WIC units have extensive training and experience with breastfeeding and can also support breastfeeding mothers.

To be certified, counselors must demonstrate the skills, knowledge and attitudes to provide counseling and management support to families considering breastfeeding or with questions or problems during breastfeeding/lactation, according to the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice.

The team doesn't just serve first-time moms. Clients also include experienced moms who've not previously had success with nursing, as well as moms who've been successful, but for any number of reasons are finding it difficult to nurse this time around.

"I am breastfeeding my third child successfully after struggling with breastfeeding my other two children," says another client, Jessica. "The nurses knew I was having a hard time with breastfeeding and pumping. Their recommendations made my life much easier and I was able to enjoy breastfeeding my son. I love it when they check his weight and tell me how good of a job I am doing feeding him. It makes me feel really good and proud."

Clients can self-refer, says Schumacher, but more often are referred by their doctor or the hospital where they gave birth. A good deal of their work comes during home visits Public Health nurses offer.

### Advice, encouragement & support

During the 1960s and '70s, commercial infant formulas became widely accepted. The product was relatively inexpensive and easy-to-use, and consumers believed they provided optimal nutrition for babies, all which pushed breastfeeding rates to an all-time low: 25%.

According to the 2017 figures from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 84.1% of babies had been breastfed. Nearly 60% are still receiving at least some breast milk at six months with 35.3% being breastfed at least part of the time at their first birthday.

Minnesota's numbers are even higher, with 95.3% ever being breastfed, 79.1% at six months and 49.8 at 12 months.

Those statistics are impressive, especially in a culture that encourages working moms to be back on the job 12 weeks after giving birth, says Schumacher.

Rice County's lactation counselors don't just offer assistance to nursing moms, they work to empower them, letting them know that it's OK to nurse in public or ask for space to pump breastmilk in the workplace.

Minnesota law requires employers to provide breastfeeding parents reasonable break time to express milk. They must also provide them a private space, other than a bathroom or a toilet stall, with access to an electrical outlet and close to the employee's workspace.



Breastfeeding is a journey that's different for everyone, says Family and Child Health Supervisor Fae Schumacher. Here, Kasara looks mighty content after drinking a bottle of her mom's expressed breastmilk. (Rice County photo)

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Visit the county website:  
[https://bit.ly/RiceCo\\_FamilyHomeVisiting](https://bit.ly/RiceCo_FamilyHomeVisiting)

Whenever possible, counselors engage the nursing parent's partner, says Schumacher, whether it's having them help clean bottles for storing expressed milk or offering support.

Counselors also understand that there are instances where breastfeeding isn't the right answer. And that's OK, says Schumacher.

"We try to meet them wherever they're at on their journey. Even if that means bottle feeding."

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