JSOnline
MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

www.jsonline.com | Return to regular view

Original Story URL:
http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=712574

Do what's best for babies

By JENNIFER L.W. FINK

Posted: Jan. 29, 2008

My youngest son is a baseball cap-wearing, truck-pushing, Elmo-loving 2-year-old.

He's also a breast-feeding champ.

Yes, my son, age 2, still nurses. So did his brothers at age 2. In fact, all together, I have more than eight years of breast-feeding experience. I've breast-fed sleepy newborns and squirmy toddlers. I've nursed lying down, sitting up and even standing. And I've nursed literally everywhere - at home, in the front row at church, on airplanes, in parks, at work, at school, at doctor's offices, at restaurants. You name it, I've nursed there.

In theory, everyone agrees that breast is best. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breast-feeding for at least a year, and even the formula companies tell you that breast milk is perfect infant nutrition.

In practice, though, a lot of people get squeamish. Breast-feeding is OK - as long as I don't have to see it. Breast-feeding is good - as long as the baby is weaned before a year.

In 2007, state Sen. Fred Risser (D- Madison) introduced a bill informally known as the Right to Breast-feed Act. The impetus for the bill was the harassment of a breast-feeding mother at a shopping center; a security guard approached her and asked her to move to the women's restroom. Before you consider that a reasonable request, consider this: A 1997 study found that women's restrooms are germ-laden. Twice as laden, in fact, as men's restrooms.

But the Right to Breast-feed Act, which allows women to breast-feed anywhere they and their children are otherwise authorized to be and includes a $200 penalty for anyone who harasses the breast-feeding mother, has not yet become law. It passed the Senate last spring but stalled in the Assembly. It's currently languishing before the Assembly Committee on Health and Healthcare Reform, chaired by Rep. Leah Vukmir (R-Wauwatosa). A representative from Risser's office told me, "There's not a lot of expectation of action." (Vukmir did not return my calls.)

This is disappointing. While it's true that breast-feeding is not illegal, Wisconsin law only addresses breast-feeding in exceptions. Subsections of the laws addressing "sexual gratification" and "exposing genitals or pubic area" exempt breast-feeding mothers. Even the state law, it seems, views women's breasts as primarily sexual objects.

Is it any wonder then that Wisconsin's breast-feeding rates are so abysmal? At 6 months, only 39.6% of Wisconsin infants are breast-fed; at 12 months, that number drops to 19%. These numbers, unfortunately, aren't far from national averages but fall short of the Healthy People 2010 breast-feeding goals of 50% at 6 months and 25% at one year.

Harassment may make new mothers hesitant to nurse in public. And if a mother is scared to breast-feed, wherever she may be, odds are she's not going to breast-feed long. After all, who wants to be cooped up inside all day?

It's time for Wisconsin to pass the Right to Breastfeed Act. Other states are light years ahead of us on this issue. Thirty-

three states allow women to breast-feed anywhere they're otherwise allowed to be. Twelve states, including Illinois and Iowa, exempt breast-feeding mothers from jury duty, and 14 states explicitly address breast-feeding rights in the workplace. Maine even considers breast-feeding when awarding custody of a child.

C'mon, Wisconsin. Let's do what's best for our babies.

Jennifer L.W. Fink of Mayville is a freelance writer specializing in parenting and health. Her e-mail address is jenwrites4you@yahoo.com

Buy a link here

From the Jan. 30, 2008 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Have an opinion on this story? Write a letter to the editor.

Don’t miss one more day of local news and money-saving offers! Subscribe Today!
© 2006, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved. | Produced by Journal Interactive | Privacy Policy
Journal Sentinel Inc. is a subsidiary of Journal Communications.