
6.4 Nursing Rooms

(1 Credit: Implement 2 of 3)

- Nursing rooms are separate from toilet rooms contain a locked door, seat, changing table, electric outlet, and space for a stroller.
 - Nursing rooms have a refrigerator and/or sink.
 - Nursing rooms have companion seating
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1. Overview

The health, economic and environmental benefits of breastfeeding have prompted a continual increase in breastfeeding rates throughout the United States over the past 30 years. With an economy that largely relies on working mothers, nursing rooms are becoming a vital part of workplaces as well as public spaces. Nursing rooms, or lactation rooms, help to reduce barriers to breastfeeding for new mothers. The American Association of Pediatrics recommends that new mothers exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of their infant's life, while combining breast milk with other sources of nutrition until the child is two years of age or beyond ¹. Unfortunately, mothers cite several barriers to long-term breastfeeding, such as a lack of support, inconvenience of pumping or feeding in public spaces, and employer's inadequacies in providing mothers with appropriate facilities and time allowances to pump or feed ¹.



Figure 1: Image courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Mothers are currently the fastest-growing population in the U.S. workforce ². Nearly 54 percent of mothers with children under the age of one are employed and of that population, the majority work full time and return to work only three months after delivery ³. Although the U.S. Department of Labor requires that employers provide a nursing mother reasonable break time to express breast milk and a private place to do so, many employers fall short of meeting this requirement ⁴, and even fewer public places provide such accommodations. Guidelines specify that any facility employing more than 50 persons, provide a non-restroom, milk expression room for employee use ⁴, however a 2009 study conducted by the society for Human Resource Management found that less than 25% of employers surveyed provided any such program or room for this use ⁵. This is problematic as many mothers that do not have a private space for the expression of milk will resort to premature weaning ⁵, and ultimately limiting health benefits for themselves and their child.



Figure 2: Nursing Room accommodating comfortable seating, movable, additional seating, a refrigerator, and clear knee space beneath a work surface. Image courtesy of the Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

2. Issues to Consider

Environmental Controls. Indoor temperature and illumination can have a great effect on physical comfort and wellbeing. Providing a comfortable, adaptable environment for milk expression or breastfeeding contributes to the usability and successful design of the space. Individual control over local thermal environment and illumination increases occupant comfort and satisfaction within a space⁶. Many women recount that pumping can be uncomfortable and cumbersome, efforts to improve comfort are greatly appreciated. The American Institute of Architects recommend that the lighting in the space be uniform and adjustable to help create a soothing or relaxing environment. The availability of task lighting for the cleaning and preparation of pumping equipment is helpful. See *the isUD Solutions*, section 4.0 for environmental design recommendations; specifically figure 6 in Section 4.1 the subjective effects of light.

Furniture. Depending on the mother's feeding habits, milk expression can last anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, making comfortable seating an important feature to consider. The seat should ideally be adjustable, have armrests, an ottoman or footstool, be located near lighting controls and near an outlet. The adjacency to outlets provides the benefit of using electronic devices such as cellular phones or laptops making it easier to work or read while pumping. Additional seating should be provided in the instance that a companion or older child should be accompanying the nursing mother. Seating should be easily movable while allowing for enough space in the room to accommodate a stroller and mobility devices. Refer to *isUD Section 2.0* on required space clearances.

Fixtures/Accessories. Providing everything a mother may need while nursing or feeding in one space will help to improve the overall privacy and efficiency of a nursing room. Installing a sink and refrigerator to the space help a great deal for sanitation and milk storage. When designing for a space that's likely to have the same regular users for extended periods of time, providing an electric pump to remain in the room can be an added benefit for users, allowing them to only need to provide attachment parts for personal use.



Figure 3: Nursing room signage. Image courtesy of Colorado State University.

Privacy. Embarrassment and lack of privacy (visual and acoustical) are reasons often cited for premature weaning. Providing mothers with the necessary features to comfortably and privately feed or nurse helps to reduce that risk. Nursing rooms should have signage indicating its use and a user-controlled lockable door to avoid the fear of someone entering while feeding or pumping. If the room is not acoustically private, absorbent interior finishes like carpeting, drapery, or acoustical panels should be used to muffle the noise from a child or an electronic pump.

3. Referenced Standards

Section 7(r) of the Fair Labor Standards Act – Break Time for Nursing Mothers Provision

requires employers to provide a nursing mother reasonable break time to express breast milk for one year after the birth of her child. The Amendment also requires that employers employing more than 50 people, provide a place other than a restroom for an employee to express breast milk ⁴.”

4. Measurement and Verification

Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) or Employee Satisfaction Surveys would be an effective way to identify that the needs of nursing mothers are met in various facilities. Typical questions measure satisfaction with the lactation room accommodations, the availability of the room when needed, and the willingness of supervisors to provide needed flexibility for milk expression.

5. Design Considerations

For 6.4, Nursing Rooms (1 Credit: Implement 2 of 3)

1. *Nursing rooms are separate from toilet rooms; contain a locked door, seat, changing table, electric outlet, and space for a stroller.* For sanitation and privacy concerns, a restroom should never be identified as a suitable place for milk expression ⁷.
 - To provide appropriate sanitation the room should be equipped with a sink, paper towels, disinfectant and anti-microbial wipes and/or spray. The regular cleaning of the room by facility management will also help to ensure sanitation.
 - Installing a lock, preferably with an indicator of occupancy, will further provide privacy to the space.
 - Seating should always be provided, should be comfortable, have armrests and be adjustable to the greatest extent possible.
 - A counter space can serve as both a changing table and a working surface if space is limited. It should also be designed to an accessible height with clear knee space beneath, *See isUD Section 2.3 for Knee and Toe Clearance recommendations.*
 - Electric outlets should be located for easy access for use of electric breast pump and other electronic devices, refer to *isUD Section 2.4 for Reach Target recommendations.*
 - When the nursing room is being used for feeding directly, it's likely that the nursing mother will have a stroller and will want it in the room with her and her child so accounting for that additional space is imperative.
2. *Nursing rooms have a refrigerator and/or sink.* Often times when mothers need to utilize a nursing room, they are using it for the purpose of pumping, and when doing so, they will need a cool, safe place to store their milk. An under-counter model can help to conserve space and cost, but should not be used anywhere where it will inhibit required clear knee space ⁸.
3. *Nursing rooms have companion seating.* Many mothers feel as though they are isolated from social settings or have a lack family support when breastfeeding. Providing companion seating can be a strategy to mitigate this or encourage socialization by

providing additional seating. Many mothers also have more than one child, and providing an additional space for an older child to sit can be helpful.

6. Definitions

Breast pump	A mechanical device that extracts milk from the breasts of lactating women.
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7. References

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