Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition

Guidelines for appropriate use of breast pumps

The Affordable Care Act requires coverage for breastfeeding supplies and counseling for new private insurance plans. As an expert body in lactation care and services, the Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition is providing guidance on the appropriate use of breast pumps. Timely access to pumps and qualified help, within 24 hours if possible, is crucial to breastfeeding success. In the neonatal period, even a few days without appropriate resources could mean the difference between breastfeeding success and failure due to the physiologic processes involved in establishing and maintaining a mother's milk supply. We have found that weekends can be a particularly vulnerable time for these mothers.

About Breast Pumps:

There are a variety of types of breast pumps, with some being more appropriate for certain situations than others. We have come across a number of situations where women were given an inappropriate pump for their situation, which could result in significant adverse health outcomes for themselves and their infants.

All pumps are not the same. They differ in their ability to efficiently remove milk from a mother's breast. In addition, pumps that express milk from both breasts simultaneously, "double pumps," have the added benefit of increasing a mother's prolactin levels, which further aids in the initiation and maintenance of her milk supply.

It is also important to realize that breast pumps generally do not remove milk as efficiently as does a healthy term infant who is nursing correctly. A mother's milk supply is determined by the amount of milk that is removed: the more milk removed, the more milk she will make. Therefore, mothers who are dependent on breast pumps to remove milk for much of their day require a highergrade pump in order to continue to make sufficient milk. This includes mothers who are separated from their infants due to illness, long workdays, or mothers of premature infants who are not yet able to suckle at the breast.

Premature infants are at markedly increased risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) without breast milk. This disease has a significant mortality rate and costs over $130,000 per case.

Hospital grade pumps: These multi-user pumps are often rented, as they are expensive but have been shown to be the most efficient and effective in situations where the mother's milk production is totally or mostly dependent on the use of a breast pump. These pumps have sensitive controls that allow a mother to regulate suction rhythm, intensity, and pressure. Some have a pumping action that simulates a baby's natural sucking, which can help to build and maintain a mother's milk supply, and can empty both breasts at once. We recommend hospital-grade double electric pumps for the following situations:

- Mothers of preterm or late preterm infants
- In cases of mother-infant separation due to hospitalization of either the infant or the mother
- Mothers of infants who are not gaining weight appropriately
- In situations of infant oral anomalies
- Infants who cannot latch onto the breast at all, for whatever reason

Midweight, personal-use, automatic breast pumps: These electric breast pumps typically are lighter and slightly less efficient than the hospital-grade models, but can also empty both breasts at once. They are lighter, often the size of a briefcase or backpack. They are typically used for working mothers. These are not suitable for mothers who are completely pump-dependent such as mothers of preterm infants or in situations where the infant is not feeding at the breast.

Small electric or battery-powered pumps: Using widely available AA or C batteries or household current, these lightweight, compact devices can fit discreetly into a purse or briefcase. The suction can be sluggish, although the vacuum on some models can be regulated for maximum comfort. Others, though, have a constant vacuum that can cause nipple discomfort. They empty only one breast at a time, and are much less efficient than the pumps described above. They are suitable only for mothers who pump occasionally, such as for a night out, or a couple of hours during the day.

Manual pumps: Like the small electric or battery-powered pumps, these pumps tend to be relatively inefficient, and are thus suitable only for mothers who pump occasionally, such as for a night out or a couple of hours during the day.

Detailed information can also be found at the Consumer Reports website. The Rhode Island Breastfeeding Coalition, in conjunction with the Rhode Island Department of Health, also has additional information on breast pumps.

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