

City wants mothers to breastfeed at workplace

Cape Town urges employers to change attitude

By **Nashira Davids** and **Tanya Farber**

The City of Cape Town has called on companies to set up facilities for women to express milk in the workplace and breastfeed their babies.

In fact, authorities here are so serious about the issue that they have started a Breast-feeding Restoration Plan.

Last year, the city recruited infant feeding counsellors through the Expanded Public Works Programme to clinics to advocate why breast is best.

According to the city, breast-feeding during the first six months of a child's life is "critical" and should "continue in conjunction with solid foods" until the child is two years old.

JP Smith, the mayoral committee member for social services, said the widespread availability of formula had made the natural way less attractive to moms.

"Celebrating Breastfeeding Week is therefore crucial in our drive to explain to mothers why breast-feeding is best, as well as ensure that they are able to do it in relative comfort at home or in the workplace.

"Changing societal attitudes is necessary to create an enabling environment for breast-feeding mothers."

Last year, a woman was thrown out of a major clothing retailer in Cape Town for breast-feeding her newborn in the store.

After Tasneem Botha took to Facebook, a group of 30 mothers staged a "nurse-in" at Edgars in Cavendish Square.

Management welcomed them and apologised for Botha's experience.

"It wasn't a nice incident but I am glad about what happened since," said Botha, 29.

"It has opened people's eyes to this issue."

Marion Stevens, a research associate at the Africa Gender Institute, said mostly the middle class tended to have a conservative approach to sexual and reproductive health.

"Feeding a baby is the most basic exchange," said Stevens.

The city's health department said it would undertake a survey to gauge mothers' views and attitudes towards exclusive breastfeeding. A pilot project at clinics in the city found that 40% of moms were exclusively breastfeeding.

World Breastfeeding Week runs from August 1 to 7.

A mother breastfeeds her baby.

