

Nevada's Infant-at-Work Program

Having babies in the workplace is a low-cost and highly effective way to create a more positive and productive atmosphere, improve morale among employees, and lower employer healthcare costs.

The Nevada State Health Division (NSHD) first piloted their [Infant-at-Work program](#) in 2009 when they had five pregnant employees at one time. The program enables parents to bring their new babies to work while continuing to do their jobs, generally until the babies are six to nine months old or mobile. When structured well, these programs are low-cost and highly effective, allowing mothers and fathers to return to work earlier rather than choosing to stay at home or look for jobs with more flexibility. Since 2009, NSHD has reported numerous benefits from the program, including greater employer appreciation and loyalty, lower healthcare costs, higher breastfeeding rates, and families reporting greater financial stability.

Steps Taken:

- NSHD staff members were introduced to the idea of bringing babies to the workplace while collaborating with the Arizona Women, Infants & Children (WIC) program. Arizona's Babies-at-Work policy had been in place for 10 years, and NSHD's employees saw the positive impact it had on the work environment.
- Employees consulted with the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Parenting in the Workplace Institute to learn more about the programs and how to implement them successfully. The idea was then presented to the Nevada State Health Division Administrator Richard Whitley, who immediately supported launching a pilot program.
- The NSHD human resources department drafted the program's policies, which included guidelines regarding where diapers should be changed, designating where baby-free zones would be if requested, avoiding disrupting coworkers, and completing assigned work. They then reviewed those policies with each interested employee and their immediate supervisor prior the employee's participation in the program and the baby's arrival.
- Employees were responsible for bringing their own baby-related items to the office (e.g. swings, portable cribs, etc.), so implementation costs were low. The only expense was for the installation of changing tables in the women's and men's bathrooms.
- All employees, including participants and nonparticipants, were informed and educated about having infants in the workplace to dispel any myths and discuss the overall benefits the program would have for the employer, families, and babies.

- The average maternity leave was six weeks for the 14 participating employees.
- The health division has never received a formal complaint about having a baby at the workplace.
- Babies' presence in the workplace increases morale.

Results:

- To date, 14 babies have been brought into NSHD, which typically has one or two infants in the office at a time. One employee even brought in a grandchild. There has only been one mother who dropped out of the program because of personal reasons.
- All of the feedback from both the participating and nonparticipating employees has been very positive. Since the program began, there have been no formal complaints or requests for baby-free zones, even from departments within the division that work in smaller office spaces.
- Having babies in the workplace has changed the atmosphere for the better by opening up lines of communication, bringing employees closer together, and improving morale. In addition, new parents have an automatic support system and a place to get their questions answered by coworkers who already have children.
- Higher rates of breastfeeding have been reported among employees. Although no specific numbers are available for NSHD, research has shown that healthcare costs are lower when infants are breastfed because they typically need fewer sick care doctor visits, prescriptions, and hospitalizations.
- With such positive results, the program has expanded to other agencies in the state: Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Nevada Child and Family Services, Nevada Division of Health Care Financing and Policy, and the Ron Wood Family Resource Center, a nonprofit.

Lessons Learned:

- Productivity increased because people are inclined to be much happier around babies.
- Babies at work tend to be very content because parents respond quickly to their needs to avoid disturbing their coworkers.
- After the initial novelty wears off, babies become a fixture in the office and are not seen as a distraction.
- Similar programs can be implemented with minimal investment as long as clear expectations and rules are in place.
- Employers should expect there to be a transition period for parents and babies to develop a routine at work, but overall the transition back to work is much easier emotionally and financially on families.
- Clients and customers often extend positive feedback to organizations with infant-at-work programs because they show dedication to their employees, which reflects a strong dedication to their customers.