

**For Immediate Release**

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**Black Mothers' Breastfeeding Group Lowering Disparities in Breastfeeding**

*Black Breastfeeding week is Aug. 25-31*

YPSILANTI, Mich., Aug. 27, 2019 – To help promote early breastfeeding success and positive outcomes, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has declared August Breastfeeding Awareness Month and named Aug. 25-31 Black Breastfeeding Week.

“Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed a baby,” says Gayathri Akella, WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) Service Coordinator at the Washtenaw County Health Department. “But balancing breastfeeding with all the other work and stressors in life takes commitment and support. We’re dedicated to help mothers and babies on their breastfeeding journeys, and to lower the racial disparities in breastfeeding and infant mortality rates.”

Across Michigan, black infants are three times more likely to die than white infants before their first birthday. In Washtenaw County, they’re over four times more likely.

Among Washtenaw County WIC clients, 76 percent of black and African American women start breastfeeding, compared to 81 percent of white women. Breastfeeding strengthens babies’ immune systems, guards them against obesity and diabetes and forges a strong bond with their mom, among many other benefits. It also helps protect moms from breast and ovarian cancers and from post-partum depression. As babies grow, their mothers’ breast milk changes to meet their nutritional needs.

A breastfeeding support group for black mothers was created by Washtenaw County WIC last year with the goal of lowering the racial disparity in breastfeeding rates. During the first year of the support group, the rate of black mothers in WIC who continue to breastfeed their infants at four to eight weeks has increased from 32 percent to 48 percent – similar to the 50 percent rate for white women with four to eight week infants. Mothers often have difficulty breastfeeding during this four to eight week time because of needs to return to work or other responsibilities.

“Being able to meet up with other mothers of color, other mothers who look like me, I feel more supported and welcomed,” says Najma Treadwell, a member of the group. “We get to connect with other moms. To have that is awesome, and to know it’s in your community. These are people right here, in Washtenaw County, where I live, where I shop.”

Treadwell, who started breastfeeding her first child 15 years ago, continues, “I’m able to encourage young mothers. To see another mother who looks like you and has been doing this for years is a plus. I wish I could have had something like that before, but I’m so glad we have it now.”

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The black mothers' breastfeeding support group meets four times a year. The next meeting will be October 30, 2019. Follow [Washtenaw County WIC Breastfeeding Support on Facebook](#) or call Washtenaw County WIC at 734-544-6800 for more information. All pregnant and breastfeeding people are welcome.

**Washtenaw County Health Department**

The Washtenaw County Health Department promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs.

The Washtenaw County Health Department has achieved national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board. Visit us at [washtenaw.org/health](http://washtenaw.org/health) or call 734-544-6700.

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