Lactation Room Design

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SUMMARY

Mothers returning to the workplace after childbirth are incredibly driven to provide for their new babies but also to be productive members of the workforce. Companies that provide lactation rooms in the workplace help these employees achieve both of these goals. Following the design guidelines given here will yield a lactation room that is easy to use and offers comfort and respect to mothers.

BACKGROUND

The influx of women in the workplace starting in the 1960s was partly attributable to the development of infant formula. Formula gives mothers of newborn babies added freedom to return to work after childbirth.

However, in the past 40 years, research findings overwhelmingly in favor of breast milk over formula have instigated a marked increase in the number of mothers choosing to nurse their children for the first year of life or longer. The dramatic health benefits for infant and mother have influenced these mothers to dedicate long and tedious hours to pumping and storing breast milk when they are not with their babies. Many of these mothers return to work after just 6 to 12 weeks, and they need a dedicated place where they can comfortably and efficiently collect and store breast milk in the workplace.

ROOM REQUIREMENTS

Several times a day, a nursing mother needs to retreat to a quiet, closed room to collect expressed milk. She needs a calm restful environment with all the required elements for an efficient and safe pumping session.

A typical pumping session includes changing clothes, sitting at a desk in front of a pump for 15 to 30 minutes, placing milk in storage bottles, washing bottles and pump parts and packing them away until the next pumping session, and redressing and returning to work. At the end of the session, the pumped milk must be stored in a refrigerator or cooler. In an eight-hour work day two or three pumping sessions are normal.

Other considerations for lactation rooms, or mothers' rooms, include the need for actual and perceived privacy. Pumps can be noisy so sound dampening is important to achieve auditory comfort in and around the space. Walls, doors, and locks must be substantial and provide a good sense of security.

Lactation rooms should provide, at a minimum, a lockable door; a work surface and chair; a small utility-type sink; storage for cleaning supplies and paper towels; adequate HVAC service, including a thermostat; and well-placed electrical outlets. Telephone service and network connections for the room are also recommended to increase worker safety and productivity. Accessibility guidelines should be met for all the features of the room.

Size

A minimum footprint of 7 feet by 7 feet is recommended as it allows for a 5-foot radius circle with 24-inch deep counters on two walls. Other configurations such as 10 feet by 5 feet work well, too.

Location

Mothers' rooms should be located in a safe area accessible to all. They should not be located in areas that would not be suitable for the preparation and storage of food.

Privacy

Install a user-operated deadbolt for privacy. The best locks are indicator dead bolts that display an "occupied" message to discourage interruptions.

Sound Privacy

Walls should reach up to the structure above to minimize sound transmission over them into adjacent spaces. Install sound attenuation in walls to minimize sound transmission. Install fabric panels, curtains, carpeting, or other sound-dampening materials to minimize echoes.

Chair

Provide a task chair suitable for a workstation. Seat, back, armrest, lumbar, tension, and height adjustments are preferable. Casters are also important to allow the user freedom of movement when hands are occupied with bottles of milk and pump parts.

Table/Counter

Provide a minimum 20-inch deep by 30-inch wide plastic laminate or solid work surface for the pump and bottles to rest on in front of the task chair. Provide a 30-inch wide clear knee space beneath the counter. Provide above counter outlets at the work area. If a telephone is provided, it should be within easy reach of the work area.

Sink

Provide a sink and faucet combination deep enough to wash bottles and pump parts. Goose neck or kitchen type faucets are recommended. If possible, locate the sink adjacent to the work area.

Lighting and HVAC

Task lighting should be provided over the sink and the work area. Overhead lighting is also appropriate if light levels at the work surfaces are adequate. Temperature should be maintained year-round at a comfortably warm level such as in a dressing room. Install a thermostat in the room to increase user control and thermal comfort.

Milk Storage

Install a midsize or compact refrigerator for milk storage. Under-counter models help conserve floor space but should not take up the knee space beneath the work area.

Accessories

Useful accessories in a mothers' room include a trash can, a paper towel dispenser, a coat rack or coat hooks, a full-length mirror, a magazine rack, and a bulletin board. If many mothers will be sharing the room, installing a clipboard or bulletin board outside the door will help schedule room use.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

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RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

18.03.04	Ventilation for Durability in Residential Design
18.18.03	Resource Review: *Green Guide for Health Care*
18.01.01	The Optimum Performance Home

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Accessibility Compliance" by John P.S. Salmen, AIA, and "Sustainable Building Design" by Muscoe Martin, AIA, in *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 18, pages 551 and 656, respectively.

See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.

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Key Terms

- Design
- Use design
- Accessibility
- Universal design