

PRINT-New law should ease holiday travel for breastfeeding mothers

Traveling through an airport is stressful for many families, but for breastfeeding mothers, it can be especially overwhelming. A new law aims to change that by improving how the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) handles breast milk, pumping supplies and formula at security checkpoints.

The bipartisan-supported [BABES \(Bottles and Breastfeeding Equipment Screening\) Enhancement Act](#) recently signed into law was co-sponsored by Illinois U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth.

Becky Miller, RN, CLC, lactation counselor for OSF HealthCare, says legislation has long been needed to help parents move through security more quickly while ensuring breast milk and related supplies are handled safely.

"We can make sure of the safe handling of breast milk and their pumping supplies are happening. We can make sure they can get through safely, quickly and parents don't have to worry about the stress of traveling and can get to where they want to go safely."

Miller says legislative hearings on the legislation featured stories from breastfeeding moms.

"They've had to be pulled aside from other people. They put test strips down in their milk and wonder, 'Has my milk just been contaminated?' Is it still safe?' Even formula-fed babies – they do that to the water to make sure there's nothing in it." She adds, "So, these things and getting better policies for safe handling is the best part of this legislation."

Law adds accountability

The legislation also requires TSA to regularly update its screening guidance for breast milk and infant nutrition items, develop that guidance in consultation with maternal health experts, and apply the rules to both TSA officers and private security contractors. It also calls for a federal audit to review compliance and report findings to Congress, creating oversight and accountability if procedures aren't followed.

Miller points out the new law reflects how attitudes toward breastfeeding have changed in recent years, as it has become more widely accepted and supported in public spaces and with the growth of online communities to support breastfeeding moms. She observes the law helps ensure federal policy finally aligns with society's values by protecting breastfeeding families in real-world situations such as airport travel.

Avoiding stressful travel is also so important, Miller shares, for postpartum moms who often have mental health struggles.

"They probably have a crying baby in their arm, a 2-year-old maybe next to them who's not holding still – those are awful experiences for a mom who probably doesn't ever want to travel again. So hopefully this new legislation will help parents and families be able to go make memories as a family and not have to worry about those stresses that they had before."

The new law comes at a critical time, with packed terminals and heightened anxiety for new parents this holiday travel season. But Miller suggests that while the legislation is designed to protect and support breastfeeding mothers, there might still be some growing pains as it rolls out nationwide.

“With this being a new legislation, we do worry that not all airports have probably had all of their TSA members gone through education. There still may be some little difficulties or little hiccups here or there but I do hope every family that is traveling this holiday season is able to have a successful and happy trip.”

[Here is more information about breastfeeding support](#) available at OSF HealthCare.