

# Pregnancy-Related Factors

Overall, pregnancy is protective against breast cancer. Many personal decisions and factors contribute to if, and when, women give birth.

## Science Summary

Giving birth at any age, especially at a younger age (typically under 30), is protective against most types of breast cancer. This is because a woman's first full-term pregnancy irreversibly changes breast tissue and makes it less susceptible to cancer. Women who have multiple pregnancies may experience a cumulative protective effect against breast cancer. Breastfeeding increases the protective effect.



During pregnancy and in the immediate postpartum period, there may be a brief increase in breast cancer risk and susceptibility to chemical exposures due to our rapidly changing breast tissue. However, this increased risk is temporary and typically resolves after childbirth and breastfeeding.

There is no significant association between miscarriages or abortions and breast cancer.

## What can I do to support the health of my family and friends, and my community?

Deciding if, and when, to start a family can be a complicated and emotional topic. No one should be shamed for the reproductive decisions that they make, or pressured to make different decisions.

## How can I navigate and get support with any systemic barriers to my health?

Some women do not give birth, which may be by choice or may be medically determined. Some women want to have children earlier, but face obstacles to earlier childbirth. Some barriers are systemic, and can include a lack of guaranteed parental leave from their jobs, especially paid leave; lack of affordable high-quality child care; and lack, especially during early careers, of flexible work and childcare schedules that accommodate family responsibilities. Having open and supportive conversations about family planning is important for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

You can look into laws at the state and national level that may ensure you are entitled to long-term, job-protected, paid or unpaid leave. For example, the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) entitles eligible employees of covered employers (50 or more employees) to take 12 work weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period for the birth of a child and to care for the newborn child within one year of birth. In addition to federal and state policies, your county may also have laws that supplement paid leave.

## How can I help advocate for and support systemic change to remove barriers to health?

Though the science shows that early childbirth is protective against breast cancer risk, we celebrate that today many women have the freedom and opportunity to choose if, and when, they want to start a family. The interventions suggested below are aimed at ensuring that women who wish to start a family do not face systemic barriers. Here are some system-wide actions we can take to minimize the effect of pregnancy-related breast cancer risk:



Subsidize child care, starting from infant care, to expand the percentage of working families who receive benefits.



Implement or extend paid family leave to all workers, including contract workers and employees of small businesses.



Address socioeconomic disparities (See Race, Power and Inequities and Social and Built Environment)



Learn more and get involved.

**TOGETHER, WE CAN  
MAKE CHANGE!**

**Breast Cancer Prevention Partners (BCPP)** is the leading science-based advocacy organization working to prevent breast cancer by eliminating our exposure to toxic chemicals and other environmental exposures linked to the disease.

