

BREASTFEEDING IN PUBLIC

Is it acceptable?

Breastfeeding is best for mother and child. Despite the undisputed benefits of breastfeeding, there has been controversy in the past over breastfeeding in public, an issue which the media have readily picked up on. The general attitude appeared to be: breastfeeding yes, but please do it at home. But is this an accurate reflection of people's opinions? Are Germans against breast-feeding in public? What are the experiences of breastfeeding mothers? In order to ascertain the views of Germans on breastfeeding in public, the BfR conducted a research project in which 1,003 members of the general public above the age of 14 years and 306 mothers with children of breastfeeding age were polled – and the outcomes were, in the main, reassuring. Explicitly negative reactions to breastfeeding in public tend to be rare: only six percent of mothers who breastfeed in public reported mainly negative experiences. 66 percent of the population sample basically think that breastfeeding should be possible at any time and anywhere, compared to 80 percent of the surveyed mothers. The more people knew about the health benefits of breastfeeding, the more positive their attitude towards it. One frequently mentioned reason for critical attitudes towards breastfeeding in public was the visibility of the woman's breast. Breastfeeding in public gives rise to conflict in particular in restaurants and cafés: the polled population sample say that breastfeeding is only partly appropriate in these settings, but women cannot and do not want to avoid breastfeeding their babies in these locations. Suitable measures could be introduced for such settings in order to further boost positive attitudes towards breastfeeding in Germany. Some cities and municipalities have already made a start with voluntary signs in cafés and other public places drawing attention to the fact that they are “breastfeeding-friendly” locations.

More information:

Koch et al. 2018. Ist Stillen in der Öffentlichkeit gesellschaftlich akzeptiert? Erfahrungen und Einstellungen der Bevölkerung und stillender Mütter. Bundesgesundheitsblatt 61: 990–1000 (Open Access, in German)

