



**Families of color are disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.** In Michigan, there are over 27,000 confirmed cases and 1,768 deaths (as of April 14, 2020) ranking the state third in the nation for COVID-19 deaths. The metro-Detroit area accounts for over 80 percent of the state's cases and has been particularly impacted by COVID-19. The city of Detroit has over 7,000 cases and 427 deaths. In Michigan, African Americans make up 14 percent of the state's population; yet make up 33 percent of the state's cases and 40 percent of the state's deaths.

**COVID-19 is affecting Black families within Detroit at far greater rates than any other group.** Additionally, due to a lack of coronavirus testing in Black communities these numbers do not accurately reflect the vast number of people of color affected by COVID-19. Based on a myriad of factors all stemming from systemic racism, people of color are far more likely to contract and die from COVID-19. The lack of access to healthcare coupled with the disregard for families of color is a deadly combination for Detroit families. Mortality and morbidity rates for people of color are already higher in Detroit than for any other groups and the COVID-19 pandemic highlights this ongoing disparity. New research being disclosed daily reveals the racial disparity accompanying the U.S. outbreak of the pandemic and the medical challenges that Black communities, and other communities of color, including Latinx and Native Americans, face every day. For the Detroit community, the COVID-19 pandemic is revealing structural inequities that have long existed in America.

**In addition to experiencing the greatest number of deaths to COVID-19, Detroit area families also suffer from lack of access to healthcare during this time, including restrictions placed on birthing and breastfeeding parents.** In the wake of COVID-19, families of color require birthing and lactation support from skilled professionals. Families of color suffer disproportionately from health disparities that breastfeeding can help to alleviate. Human milk is medicine and necessary for survival during this unprecedented pandemic: human milk contains the natural immunities and antibodies that protect infants and young children when exposed to disease and infection. Based on these protective properties, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends human milk and breastfeeding as the safest infant feeding option during any type of emergency. At this time, human milk and breastfeeding should be viewed as a preventative medicine for infants and young children. Access to breastfeeding education and support within the Detroit community must continue despite the dangers posed to lactation professionals during this COVID-19 pandemic.

**Southeast Michigan IBCLCs of Color (SEMI) provides breastfeeding education and skilled birth and lactation support for families in the Metro-Detroit region.** International Board Certified Lactation Consultants are available for consultations with families to protect, support, and promote breastfeeding in the face of COVID-19, while addressing fears from within the

community about birth and infant feeding options. SEMI provides professional support from within the local community and represents and reflects the families they serve.

**Birth and breastfeeding support that centers families of color is essential to health equity, but the work of lactation professionals is often uncompensated and, without the proper protection in the wake of this deadly pandemic, is unsafe.** Currently, the lactation and birth professionals in Detroit continue to see families despite the risk it poses to themselves and their own families. Birth workers, including IBCLCs, provide critical support in the hospital and beyond. However, because they are considered separate from hospital employees, they are not receiving PPE and other sanitation measures, putting their own health at risk and forcing them to make decisions on how to support families. It is dangerous work and they are frontline workers during this pandemic. Babies continue to be born during the COVID-19 pandemic and birthing and breastfeeding restrictions are affecting Detroit families right now. Trauma from isolation during birth, separation of infant from the birthing parent, and failure to initiate breastfeeding has long-standing consequences for families in Detroit that will affect their health and well-being for generations to come. SEMI supports these birthing families and is the solution that Detroit needs to better cope with the pandemic at hand. Without SEMI, families will fail to thrive, fail to receive support, and fail to provide life-saving human milk to their infants. The importance of human milk and breastfeeding cannot be dismissed during a health crisis: it is a lifeline for families fighting for survival. SEMI needs your support now to continue its life-sustaining work for Detroit families. Your contribution will ensure that the work continues safely and that SEMI receives equitable compensation for the work they are doing right now for Detroit.

**In order to continue seeing families, SEMI needs personal protective equipment (PPE) and other sanitation items as well as lactation supplies such as breast pumps and nursing supplies.** We are joining with SEMI to provide financial support and the material donations they need to do their work. Monetary contributions will directly support paid compensation for their work in addition to the necessary lactation supplies they provide families such as breast pumps and kits both manual and electric, nipple shields, and scales. The following donations of supplies will also be accepted: N-95 masks, foot covers, hair covers, safety glasses, gloves, disinfectant cleaning supplies, and hand sanitizer. To send the actual supplies email [info@mibreastfeeding.org](mailto:info@mibreastfeeding.org) for information on where to direct your donation. Time is of the essence. SEMI is dedicated to helping families and their work has not slowed due to COVID-19. Please join us - it only takes a moment and we need you to donate today. Your support is crucial for continued birthing and breastfeeding support for Detroit families in the midst of this deadly health pandemic. Human milk is one way to safeguard the future of Detroit's families both during and after COVID-19.

**YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE! Please visit  
[www.mibreastfeeding.org/invest-detroit](http://www.mibreastfeeding.org/invest-detroit)  
to learn more and to donate today!**