

New breastfeeding study shows most moms quit early

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While the CDC recently reported that more moms than ever give breastfeeding a try, a new national study shows most moms do not stick with it as long as they should.

Although 77 percent of moms nationally start to breastfeed, the new Brigham Young University study found that only 36 percent of babies are breastfed through six months, well short of the federal government's goal to hit 50 percent by 2010. The American Association of Pediatricians recommends continued breastfeeding through the first year.

"Breastfeeding promotion programs encourage women to start but don't provide the support to continue," said Renata Forste, an author of the article *Are US Mothers Meeting the Healthy People 2010 Breastfeeding Targets for Initiation, Duration, and Exclusivity? The 2003 and 2004 National Immunization Surveys* published in the August issue of the *Journal of Human Lactation* (published by SAGE).

Breast milk is considered healthiest for babies because it is easily digested and provides antibodies that prevent ear infections and other illnesses. Earlier work by Forste supports research highlighting the link between breastfeeding and infant survival.

Many personal characteristics, such as a mother's age and education level, influence whether a baby is breastfed. Surprisingly, the new study found that where babies live also plays a role.

"We are finding that breastfeeding rates aren't just explained by the individuals who live in these areas, there's something about the areas themselves and breastfeeding," said BYU co-author John Hoffmann.

The researchers arrived at this finding by matching moms' survey responses to state and metropolitan data on infant health. Unfortunately, breastfeeding rates are lowest in areas where babies' health is considered most at risk. In the Baltimore and Philadelphia metropolitan areas, which rank low on infant health scores, only 30 percent of babies are breastfed six months or more.

"Where the need is greatest, breastfeeding happens the least," Forste said. "It's a sad irony both in terms of health needs and the expense these families incur buying formula."

Hoffmann said the research suggests future efforts to increase breastfeeding rates could target specific communities and not just individual mothers.

The article is available for free for a limited time at <http://jhl.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/24/3/278>.

Source: SAGE Publications

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