

# Researchers confirm WIC breastfeeding rate data

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While medical professionals have long known breastfeeding positively impacts infant and maternal health, few effective tools are available to measure breastfeeding practices nationally. According to a new study, one preexisting government-funded program is a potential wealth of accurate data about the breastfeeding practices of low-income mothers. This study was published in a recent issue of the *Journal of Human Lactation* (published by SAGE).

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), a USDA-funded program that provides services to over 50% of all infants in the US, collects information about breastfeeding practices from postpartum mothers when they receive their food package vouchers. Women receive different foods, depending on whether they breast or formula feed, but until now, no one knew if the feeding information WIC collected when issuing [food packages](#) reflected how the infant was really being fed.

Researchers Shannon E. Whaley, Maria Koleilat, and Lu Jiang conducted a telephone-based survey of over 2000 WIC participants to verify that the data documented in WIC administrative records was accurate. They found that the survey data they collected agreed almost perfectly with WIC records and stated that such information should be used in nationwide breastfeeding surveillance and [monitoring systems](#).

"Assessing [breastfeeding rates](#) among the low-income population, a group often shown to display the lowest rates of breastfeeding, can be

particularly challenging given high rates of mobility and lower rates of having a medical home where routine care is provided to mothers and their children," wrote the authors.

The authors claimed that the new information provided by sources such as the WIC program can remedy this challenge and is critical in order for future researchers to better understand the feeding practices of low-income women and children.

Whaley, Koleilat, and Jiang wrote, "Timely and reliable data sources about breastfeeding are needed not only to document trends in breastfeeding behavior across the country, but to identify the impact of breastfeeding on modifiable adverse health outcomes for children and their mothers."

**More information:** The article, "WIC Infant Food Package Issuance Data are a Valid Measure of Infant Feeding Practices," in *Journal of Human Lactation*, is available free for a limited time at:

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