

Study examines impact of extended maternity leave on breastfeeding in active duty mothers

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While there is no demonstrable difference in initiation of breastfeeding between six-week and 12-week maternity leave policies, there is a significant increase in breastfeeding duration and exclusivity through nine months for active duty mothers under the 12 week policy, according to a new study being presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) 2018 Meeting.

The study evaluated the effects of prolongation of [maternity leave duration](#) on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding in active duty mothers at a single military treatment facility. Secondary outcomes assessed infant and maternal health outcomes, branch-related impact and officer versus enlisted status.

Across 2014, active duty military mothers were allowed six weeks maternity leave. This was increased to 12 weeks in 2016. Breast milk and breastfeeding have significant medical, psychosocial and financial benefits for the mother-infant dyad with exclusive breastfeeding recommended for six months by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization. Additional population target recommendations have been published for exclusivity and duration according to the Healthy People 2020 goal.

The retrospective cohort study utilized data collected from U.S. Department of Defense electronic healthcare records of infants born to

active duty [mothers](#) delivered at a single site during calendar years 2014 and 2016. The study found no significant change in breastfeeding initiation occurred between the 2014 and 2016 groups. However, a significant increase in breastfeeding establishment was identified at the two (8.3 percent; $p=0.013$), four (12.7 percent; $p=0.001$), six (14 percent; $p=0.001$) and nine month (12.4 percent; $p=0.002$) visits in the 12 weeks leave cohort. Exclusive breastfeeding also increased significantly at two (8.1 percent; $p=0.043$), four (9.6 percent $p=0.015$) and six (7.5 percent; $p=0.046$) months and trended toward significance at nine months (6.1 percent; $p=0.052$).

Before this research, there were no studies evaluating military active duty breastfeeding prior and after implementation of extended maternity leave policies.

"This study was conducted to evaluate and validate existing knowledge about breastfeeding success in a military population," said Andrew Delle Donne, one of the authors of the study. "Similar to civilian studies, we found that longer duration of maternity leave increases [breastfeeding](#) success throughout the first year of life in a military population. The conclusions are important to justify increased [maternity](#) leave in the military population and provide additional support to conclusions made in civilian studies."

Mr. Delle Donne will present findings from "Impact of Extended Maternity Leave on Breastfeeding in Active Duty Mothers" during the PAS 2018 Meeting on Saturday, May 5 at 2:45 p.m. EDT.

Provided by Pediatric Academic Societies

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