UK: More than eight out of ten newborn babies 'now start to breastfeed'

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(Medical Xpress) -- The proportion of newborn babies in Britain breastfed by their mothers increased from six out of ten to eight out of ten between 1990 and 2010, according to new research by academics at the University of York.

The Infant Feeding Survey 2010: Early Results was commissioned by the NHS Information Centre and is published today. The study on which Professor Mary Renfrew, of the University's Mother and Infant Research Unit (MIRU) was lead researcher, shows the percentage of newborn babies initially breastfed by their mother.

It compares breastfeeding rates in the different countries of the UK, across age ranges and socio-economic groups of the mother and according to the birth order of the child.

The survey carried out by IFF Research in partnership with MIRU, also looks at smoking rates before and during pregnancy across the UK and makes comparisons by country, age range and socio-economic group. The full report will be available in summer 2012

The report shows that breastfeeding rates have risen since 2005 in England, Wales and Scotland.

Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of newborn babies initially breastfed rose from:

• 78 per cent to 83 per cent in England.
• 67 per cent to 71 per cent in Wales, and
• 70 per cent to 74 per cent in Scotland

For Northern Ireland, there was no statistically significant change between 2005 and 2010.

Across the UK, the percentage of mothers smoking before or during pregnancy fell from 33 per cent to 26 per cent between 2005 and 2010. Lower levels of smoking were seen in all countries in 2010 compared to 2005. The largest decreases in smoking levels before or during pregnancy were in Scotland, where smoking levels fell from 35 per cent to 27 per cent, and in England, where they fell from 32 per cent to 26 per cent.

Smoking levels before or during pregnancy were highest in Wales (33 per cent) and lowest in England (26 per cent).

Mothers who smoked were more likely to give up before or during pregnancy in 2010 than in 2005 (54 per cent and 48 per cent respectively). A smaller percentage of all mothers smoked throughout pregnancy in 2010 (12 per cent compared to 17 per cent in 2005).

Professor Renfrew said: “This is very good news, and shows that all the work by health professionals and others to help women to breastfeed over the past few years is making a difference.”

Chief executive of The NHS Information Centre Tim Straughan said: “It is pleasing to see that a greater percentage of babies than in the previous survey are being breastfed initially by their mothers. Similarly the percentage of women who are choosing to smoke either before or during pregnancy has fallen and a smaller percentage smoked throughout pregnancy.”

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More information: The report is at: www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/infantfeeding10

Provided by University of York

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