

# The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

## Education, advice and audit to improve NHS support for breastfeeding: an introduction



### Why is UNICEF's Baby Friendly Initiative needed?

Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop many illnesses in infancy, childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the UK Government all recommend that babies should be fed only breastmilk for their first six months of life.

Despite this, only two-thirds of UK babies are breastfed at birth and just one in five is still receiving breastmilk at six months (1).

In fact, most mothers want to breastfeed their babies for longer. National surveys find that three-quarters of mothers who give up breastfeeding before 6 months say they wanted to continue for longer.

The reasons given for ending breastfeeding early by the great majority of mothers relate to problems which could be avoided or solved if they had been better supported by the health services. The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative therefore works with NHS Trusts and other health care facilities to change the way they care for breastfeeding families.

We help the health services to adopt recognised best practice standards so that all parents are supported to make informed decisions about feeding their babies.

Health care facilities which adopt these standards can apply to be assessed and accredited as 'Baby Friendly' and by changing their practices, health professionals can give mothers the support, information and encouragement to continue their chosen method of feeding for as long as they wish.

### An effective way to increase breastfeeding rates

Breastfeeding rates have increased dramatically when the Baby Friendly best practice standards have been introduced:

#### In the UK...

- The proportion of babies breastfed at birth increases by more than 10% on average over 4 years when hospitals implement the Baby Friendly standards (2).
- In Scotland, babies born in Baby Friendly hospitals are 28% more likely to be exclusively breastfed at 7 days than babies born in other hospitals. Breastfeeding rates rose by 11.39% in the Baby Friendly hospitals over 8 years. (3).

#### Internationally...

- A cluster randomised controlled trial in Belarus followed 17000 mother-infant pairs for a year, and compared babies born in maternity hospitals randomly assigned to adopt the Baby Friendly standards with babies born in control hospitals which continued their previous practices (4). The Baby Friendly changes led to significant improvements:
- Exclusive breastfeeding at 3 months in the Baby Friendly Hospitals was 7 times higher than in the control hospitals. At 6 months it was 12 times higher.
- The risk of gastrointestinal tract infection was 40% lower in the Baby Friendly Hospitals. The risk of atopic eczema was 46% lower.

Breastfed babies are less likely to suffer many serious illnesses:

- Gastroenteritis, respiratory and ear infections are much less common in breastfed babies
- They are less likely to suffer from eczema, wheezing and asthma as children, particularly if there is a family history of these conditions
- Adults who were breastfed as babies are less likely to have risk factors for heart disease such as obesity, high blood pressure and high LDL cholesterol levels.

Higher breastfeeding rates would also reduce NHS costs: if all babies were breastfed, over £35million would be saved each year in England and Wales in treating gastro-enteritis alone (5).



Caroline Penn

Val Finigan, Infant Feeding Co-ordinator for Pennine Acute Trust, with Marian Carroll, Director of Nursing Services, and Steven Price, then Chairman of the Trust, receiving The Royal Oldham Hospital's renewed Baby Friendly award from Elle Macpherson in January 2005. Oldham is an area which presents significant challenges to health care delivery because of language, cultural and deprivation issues.

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## The Baby Friendly Standards

Pregnant women and new mothers should be able to expect a certain standard of health care. Baby Friendly accredited Trusts, hospitals, health centres, GP surgeries and Sure Start programmes aim to deliver that standard.

Different Baby Friendly standards apply to the different parts of the health service. However, there are common principles:

- Practices which help successful breastfeeding should become routine. These include allowing mothers and their babies unhurried time in skin contact with each other straight after delivery, and ensuring that mothers know how to put their babies to the breast in an effective, pain-free way.
- Practices which undermine successful breastfeeding should be ended. These include giving unnecessary feeds of baby milk or water, separating babies from their mothers and restricting or scheduling their feeding times.
- Parents should receive accurate, timely and effective information about successful breastfeeding during their antenatal and postnatal care. This will ensure they are able to make informed choices.
- All staff should be trained, appropriately to their role, in the skills they need to support successful breastfeeding. Health care employers should also be able to expect that newly qualified midwives, health visitors and other staff have received similar training during their pre-registration courses.
- Staff will provide the same degree of care and support to parents who decide to care for their babies differently or who don't want the information on offer. They will ensure that mothers who choose to bottle feed know how to make up a bottle properly.

### The standards:

#### Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (for the maternity services)

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all healthcare staff.
2. Train all healthcare staff in the skills necessary to implement the breastfeeding policy.
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding.
4. Help mothers initiate breastfeeding soon after birth.
5. Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation even if they are separated from their babies.
6. Give newborn infants no food or drink other than breastmilk, unless medically indicated.
7. Practice rooming-in, allowing mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day.
8. Encourage breastfeeding on demand.
9. Give no artificial teats or dummies to breastfeeding infants.
10. Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer mothers to them on discharge from the hospital or clinic.

#### Seven Point Plan for Sustaining Breastfeeding in the Community

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all healthcare staff.
2. Train all staff involved in the care of mothers and babies in the skills necessary to implement the policy
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding
4. Support mothers to initiate and maintain breastfeeding
5. Encourage exclusive and continued breastfeeding, with appropriately-timed introduction of complementary foods
6. Provide a welcoming atmosphere for breastfeeding families
7. Promote co-operation between healthcare staff, breastfeeding support groups and the local community

## Support from the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

UNICEF offers a range of assessment, training and information services to help the health services to promote and support breastfeeding. Information about all these services can be seen on our website at [www.babyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk)



Nancy Durrell McKenna

Mothers who receive good support from their health professionals have a more successful breastfeeding experience



Llandough Hospital

Mothers who hold their new babies against their skin straight away are likely to breastfeed for longer. This also helps regulate the baby's breathing and temperature after delivery.



Derby City General Hospital

UNICEF also works with universities so that student health professionals are taught the skills they need to support mothers to breastfeed successfully.

1. Hamlyn B, et al. *Infant feeding 2000*, The Stationery Office, London 2002.
2. Radford A (2001). Unicef is crucial in promoting and supporting breast feeding. *BMJ* 322:555
3. Broadfoot M, et al (2005). The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and breastfeeding rates in Scotland. *Arch Dis Child Fetal and Neonatal Edition* 90: F114-F116.
4. Kramer MS et al (2001). Promotion of breastfeeding intervention trial (PROBIT). A randomized trial in the Republic of Belarus. *JAMA* 285:413-420.
5. National Breastfeeding Working Group (1995). *Breastfeeding: Good Practice Guidance to the NHS*. Department of Health, London.