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IN THE NEWS

Breast-feeding Rates Up Dramatically, CDC Reports

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More mothers are breast-feeding and breast-feeding longer, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported in its Breastfeeding Report Card 2013, published online July 31.

Although mothers are still not nursing infants as long as recommended, provisional data for 2010 show a steady increase in the number of mothers who begin breast-feeding, with 76.5% ($\pm 1.6\%$) of mothers introducing nursing compared with 70.9% ($\pm 1.9\%$) in 2000.

Even greater strides were made in the percentage of mothers who continue to nurse beyond the early postpartum period, the report showed. At 6 months, 49.0% ($\pm 1.9\%$) of mothers were nursing in 2010 compared with 34.2% ($\pm 2.0\%$) 10 years earlier. At 12 months, 27.0% ($\pm 1.8\%$) of mothers were breast-feeding in 2010 compared with only 15.7% ($\pm 1.5\%$) in 2000.

Although most infants also receive supplemental formula feedings, the percentage of mothers relying on breast-feeding exclusively has also risen. In 2003, the first year the issue of exclusive breast-feeding was addressed, 29.6% ($\pm 1.5\%$) of infants were nursed exclusively at 3 months, and 10.3% ($\pm 1.0\%$) relied solely on breast-feeding at 6 months. By 2010, the percentage of mothers relying on breast-feeding alone for their 3-month-old infants had risen 8 percentage points to 37.7% ($\pm 1.9\%$), and the number of mothers relying solely on breast-feeding at 6 months rose 6.1% to 16.4% ($\pm 1.5\%$).

A state-by-state tally showed that Idaho had the highest percentage of breast-feeding, at 91.8%, followed by California at 91.6% and Oregon at 90.2%. Breast-feeding rates were lowest in Mississippi at 50.5%, Kentucky at 52.6%, Arkansas at 57.5%, and Tennessee at 59.6%. Other indicators of improved breast-feeding practice come from the Maternity Practices in Infant Nutrition and Care (mPINC) survey. The mPINC survey looked at mother–infant skin-to-skin contact in the hour after birth and the practice of mothers keeping infants in the room with them during the length of their hospital stay. Both practices are associated with helping mothers establish early breast-feeding and learn feeding cues, Janet L. Collins, PhD, director of the CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, said in a news release. In 2011, 54.4% of hospitals and birth centers reported that at least 90% of mothers had skin-to-skin contact with their newborns within an hour after vaginal birth. This marks a nearly 14% improvement over 2007, when 40.8% of hospitals reported that 90% of mothers had early skin-to-skin contact.

In 2011, 37.1% of hospitals reported that at least 90% of mothers had infants "rooming in" at least 23 hours per day throughout their stay compared with 30.8% in 2007. The practice of "rooming in" was most common in Western states, where hospitals reported most infants roomed in. However less than a quarter of hospitals in the Midwest and South reported that most infants roomed in. A state-by-state breakdown showed that Alaska and Washington had far and away the highest rates of rooming in, with Alaska at 95.0% and Washington at 83.3%. The next highest rate, at 72.6%, was California. North Dakota had the lowest rate, with no hospital reporting that 90% of mothers roomed in, followed by South Dakota at 5.0% and New Jersey at 9.1%.

New Hampshire had the highest rate of hospitals reporting 90% of infants having skin-to-skin contact with mothers in the first hour, at 90.5%, followed by Vermont at 90.0% and California at 79.6%. The lowest rates were in Mississippi at 27.3%, Arkansas at 32.1%, and West Virginia at 35.7%.

"This is great news for the health of our nation because babies who are breastfed have lower risks of ear and gastrointestinal infections, diabetes and obesity, and mothers who breastfeed have lower risks of breast and ovarian cancers," said CDC Director Tom Frieden, MD, MPH, in the news release.