Breastfeeding

DEFINITION

Breastfeeding is the percentage of newborn infants who are exclusively breastfed at the time of hospital discharge.

SIGNIFICANCE

Breastfeeding is widely recognized as the ideal method of feeding and nurturing infants and a critical component in achieving optimal infant and child health, growth, and development. National health experts recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months after birth, continuous breastfeeding for at least 12 months after birth, and thereafter as long as mutually desired by mother and child.

Breastfeeding decreases infant mortality and morbidity. Infant benefits include optimal nutrition and reduced risk for sudden infant death syndrome, infectious disease, and chronic conditions such as childhood obesity, type 1 and 2 diabetes, and otitis media. Breastfeeding benefits mothers by creating a strong bond with infants and decreasing risk for postpartum depression, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and breast and ovarian cancer. Breastfeeding provides significant social and economic benefits, including reduced cost to the family, reduced health care costs, and reduced employee absenteeism.

Breastfeeding can be effectively promoted by hospital and other birth facility policies and practices that take place before, during, and after labor and delivery, including access to professional lactation consultants, and involvement in mother-to-mother lactation support networks. In 2015, Women & Infants Hospital became the second-largest hospital in the U.S. to achieve the “Baby-Friendly” designation, which recognizes breastfeeding support and promotion by birth facilities. Rhode Island ranks best in the U.S. in the percentage of babies born at Baby-Friendly hospitals.

Breastfeeding rates generally increase with maternal age, higher educational attainment, and higher income levels. Whether the pregnancy was intended or not also affects breastfeeding. In Rhode Island between 2009-2011, 17% of babies from intended pregnancies were not breastfed at all, compared with 22% of babies from unintended pregnancies.

Healthy People 2020 sets target breastfeeding rates of 81.9% of infants ever having been breastfed, 60.6% at six months of age, and 34.1% at one year of age. National rates were 81.1% ever breastfed, 51.8% at six months, and 30.7% at 12 months. Rhode Island exceeds national rates in all three, reporting 81.8% of infants ever having been breastfed, 56.0% at six months, and 36.7% at one year of age.

Between 2011 and 2015, 69% of new mothers in Rhode Island indicated that they intended to exclusively breastfeed when discharged from the hospital, 22% intended to exclusively formula feed, and 8% intended to use a combination of both. Nearly nine out of ten (87%) new mothers in Rhode Island who were surveyed about three months after giving birth between 2012-2014 reported ever having breastfed. Forty-six percent of paid maternity leave are nearly three times more likely to initiate breastfeeding and twice as likely to breastfeed for six months when compared to mothers with no paid leave.

Rhode Island is one of 45 states with legislation that provides mothers with the explicit right to breastfeed in public places. Since 2015, Rhode Island law prohibits job discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions and requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for workers for conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth, including breastfeeding.

In 2014, Rhode Island became the first state in the U.S. to establish licensure for International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs). State-certified and trained lactation consultants provide comprehensive lactation support and counseling for pregnant and postpartum women. In 2015, Rhode Island had 55 IBCLCs.

Rhode Island is one of four states that have established paid family leave programs, which can support breastfeeding initiation and duration. U.S. mothers who have 12 or more weeks of paid maternity leave are nearly three times more likely to initiate breastfeeding and twice as likely to breastfeed for six months when compared to mothers with no paid leave.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, Newborn Developmental Risk Screening Program, 2011-2015. Breastfeeding and formula feeding are defined as intended feeding method at hospital discharge. Totals may not sum to 100% because data on feeding methods were not available for all births.
Breastfeeding is defined as “breastfeeding as intended feeding method at hospital discharge.” “Percent With Any Breastfeeding” includes infants fed breast milk in combination with formula and those exclusively breastfed.

The number of births screened may differ from the total number of births reported elsewhere in the Factbook as not all documented births received a screening. Births to Rhode Island women that occurred outside Rhode Island are not included.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References


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