

The effectiveness of Baby Friendly accreditation in increasing breastfeeding rates



UNICEF Ambassador Elle Macpherson presents a Baby Friendly award to the Royal Oldham Hospital upon its re-accreditation in January 2005: the unit's breastfeeding rate has doubled while it has adopted the standards.

Published evidence

Mothers delivering in Baby Friendly accredited hospitals are 10% more likely to initiate breastfeeding.

Data from the Millennium Cohort Study of 18 819 children born in the year 2000 found that mothers delivering in Baby Friendly accredited hospitals are 10% more likely to initiate breastfeeding (after adjustment for confounding variables) than those who deliver in non-accredited units or units with a Certificate of Commitment.

However, the study found that Baby Friendly hospital accreditation is not associated with an increase in breastfeeding at one month of age and the authors call for further interventions such as the Baby Friendly community service award to help mothers sustain breastfeeding.

Bartington S, Griffiths L, Tate A, Dezateux C and the Millennium Cohort Study Child Health Group. Are breastfeeding rates higher among mothers delivering in Baby Friendly accredited maternity units in the UK? *International Journal of Epidemiology*. doi:10.1093/ije/dyl155

Mothers are 28% more likely to breastfeed in Baby Friendly Hospitals

Data on all babies (n=464,246) born between 1995 and 2002 in Scottish maternity units with more than 50 births per year shows that babies born in Baby Friendly hospitals are 28% more likely to be exclusively breastfed at 7 days postnatal age than babies born in other hospitals. Breastfeeding rates increased faster in the Baby Friendly hospitals: an 11.39% (95%CI 10.35, 12.43) rise compared with 7.97% (95%CI 7.21, 8.73) in other units.

Broadfoot M et al. The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and breastfeeding rates in Scotland. *Archives of Disease in Childhood Fetal and Neonatal Edition* 2005; 90: F114-F116

Baby Friendly accreditation adds 10% to breastfeeding uptake

Hospitals increase their breastfeeding initiation rate by an average of 10.6% over 4 years around the time of achieving Baby Friendly accreditation. On average, 70.6% of babies born in Baby Friendly hospitals were breastfed at birth during the year after they were accredited as Baby Friendly, an increase from 60% in these units four years earlier. Half the reported increase appears to be directly associated with assessment and accreditation.

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. Baby Friendly hospitals show strong increase in breastfeeding rates. *Baby Friendly News* No 6, July 2000.



Prime Minister Tony Blair presenting Sure Start Peterlee in County Durham with its Baby Friendly award in December 2002. The breastfeeding initiation rate in the area rose from 24% to 53% over the 2 years taken to achieve accreditation.

Baby Friendly hospitals in Scotland increased their breastfeeding rate at 7 days by 8.1% (95%CI 7.0, 9.2) between 1990–91 and 1998–99, compared with a rise of just 2.2% (95%CI 1.6, 2.8) among hospitals without a Baby Friendly award.

Tappin DM et al. Breastfeeding rates are increasing in Scotland. *Health Bulletin* 2001; 59(2): 102–107.

RCT evidence for increasing breastfeeding and reduced illness

A cluster randomised controlled trial among 17,046 mother–infant pairs in Belarus found that implementing the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative significantly increased the duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding and decreased the risk of gastrointestinal tract infection and of atopic eczema in the first year of life.

Infants from Baby Friendly hospitals were significantly more likely than control infants to be breastfed to any degree at 12 months (adjusted OR, 0.47; 95%CI 0.32, 0.69), were more likely to be exclusively breastfed at 3 months (43.3% vs 6.4%; $P < .001$) and at 6 months (7.9% vs 0.6%; $P = .01$), and had a significant reduction in the risk of 1 or more gastrointestinal tract infections (OR, 0.60; 95% CI, 0.40–0.91) and of atopic eczema (OR, 0.54; 95% CI, 0.31–0.95).

While this study is based outside the UK, it is uniquely important due to the randomised controlled nature of the trial.

Kramer MS et al. Promotion of breastfeeding intervention trial (PROBIT). A randomized trial in the Republic of Belarus. *JAMA* 2001; 285: 413–420.

Case studies

The Royal Oldham Hospital serves a deprived area with nearly 30% of its clientele made up of non-English speakers. Its breastfeeding initiation rate rose from 29% in 1994 to 55% on accreditation in 1999. A further increase to 62% was achieved by the time of re-assessment in 2004. The breastfeeding initiation rate rose again to 65% in 2006.

Queen's Park Hospital, Blackburn: breastfeeding initiation increased from 27% in 1991 to 61% on accreditation in 1998. In 2006 their breastfeeding rates had risen even further to 68%.

North Manchester Hospital: breastfeeding rates increased from 29% to 61% in five years while working towards the award (accredited 2006)

Walsall Manor Hospital: breastfeeding rates on transfer home from hospital increased from 33% in 1995 to 48% after achieving Baby Friendly accreditation in 2006.

Altnagelvin Area Hospital and Foyle HSS (community) Trust, Londonderry: Breastfeeding initiation rose from 33% in 1996, to 44% on accreditation in 2001. It increased a further 7% by re-assessment in 2003, while the breastfeeding rate in the NICU rose by 17%.

Royal Alexandra Hospital, Paisley: breastfeeding at 8 days rose from 30% in 1991 to 43% in 2000. This had risen further to 50.5% by re-assessment in 2003.

Osmaston and Allenton Sure Start in Derby had just two of its mothers breastfeeding when work towards accreditation began in late 2000. This had risen to more than 50 by accreditation in early 2003.

Northgate Surgery, Pontefract was accredited in March 2001. In 1997, before adoption of the Baby Friendly standards, the incidence of breastfeeding was 25%. This had increased to 41% by accreditation.

Anniesland, Bearsden & Milngavie Local Health Care Cooperative, Glasgow reported its breastfeeding initiation rate rising from 75% to 83% in the 12 months prior to accreditation in 2003.

Cost savings

While there are costs involved in training staff and implementing the Baby Friendly standards, the costs of not doing this are likely to be higher:

- The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence's Postnatal Care Guideline compares the costs of achieving Baby Friendly accreditation with the savings to be made from the lower treatment costs which would result. It concludes that 'it is highly likely that the Initiative is cost-effective'.¹
- It was estimated in 1995 that the NHS spends £35 million per year in England and Wales in treating gastroenteritis in bottle-fed infants.² Updating this figure to 2005 using a 3% inflation rate, a 1% increase in breastfeeding among babies at 13 weeks will save approximately £672,000 per year in treating this illness alone.
- Figures from the USA estimate a minimum saving of \$3.6 billion per year on treating otitis media, gastroenteritis and necrotising enterocolitis if breastfeeding were increased from current levels (64% in-hospital, 29% at 6 months) to 75% and 50%.³
- Breastfed babies have 15% fewer GP consultations during their first 6 months of life than babies fed on artificial formula.⁴

1 NICE clinical guidance. Postnatal care: Routine postnatal care of women and their babies www.nice.org.uk/page.aspx?o=CG37

2 National Breastfeeding Working Group. Breastfeeding: Good Practice Guidance to the NHS. Department of Health, London 1995.

3 Weimer J. The Economic Benefits of Breastfeeding: A Review and Analysis. ERS Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. 13. March 2001. [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr13/]

4 McConnachie A et al. Modelling consultation rates in infancy: influence of maternal and infant characteristics, feeding type and consultation history. *Br J Gen Pract* 2004; 54: 598-603.

For more information about any of these services, please call the Baby Friendly Initiative office on 0844 801 2414, visit www.babyfriendly.org.uk e-mail bfi@unicef.org.uk or see the appropriate information sheet.

This is one of a series of information sheets about the work of the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative. Related information sheets about the services listed here are also available and can be seen at www.babyfriendly.org.uk/information