

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Breastfeeding during the first six months of life is widely recognized to be the optimal method of feeding because it provides benefits to both mother and infant. The Breastfeeding Council for Canada, the Canadian Pediatric Society and the World Health Assembly all recommend “exclusive” breastfeeding for the first six months of life, after which time, breastfeeding is supplemented by complementary foods to two years and beyond.

One of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines is “to increase to 50 per cent the percentage of infants breastfed up to six months by the year 2010.”

In 2004/05, Peel Health undertook two telephone surveys of new mothers in the Region of Peel. Survey tools were designed to collect information about breastfeeding practices among new mothers at six and 12 months post-partum. This survey was a follow-up to a breastfeeding survey conducted in 2000.

Over the course of the data collection phase for the six-month survey, a total of 1,258 telephone numbers were called and 928 surveys completed, yielding a response rate of 82%. For the 12-month survey, a total of 473 telephone numbers were called and 411 surveys completed, yielding a response rate of 93%.

Mothers in the 2004/05 surveys were slightly older than the general population of new mothers (based on those who gave birth in the year 2001). In addition, a higher proportion of mothers in both the six-month and 12-month surveys were married compared to 2001 census data. A larger proportion of survey respondents also indicated that they had completed university compared to the 2001 Census population.

Due to differences in respondent characteristics between the six- and 12-month surveys and the available live birth and census data, estimates should be interpreted with caution as they may not be representative to the general population of new mothers.

Results - Six-Month Post-Partum Survey

Breastfeeding Initiation

A total of 71% of the 882 mothers surveyed fed their newborns breastmilk, 17% fed their newborns a combination of breastmilk and formula, while 12% fed their newborns formula. Of those who fed their newborn formula, 48.5% said that they

had tried to breastfeed. This translates to a breastfeeding initiation rate of 94%. Breastfeeding initiation rates varied with a number of maternal characteristics.

Breastfeeding Duration

In 2004/05, 58% of all respondents reported that they breastfed their baby to six months or longer. The six-month breastfeeding duration rate varied with a number of characteristics including: age group of mother; highest level of education completed; marital status; household income; and period of immigration for those mothers who were foreign-born.

Breastfeeding Exclusivity Duration

Exclusive breastfeeding was defined as a feeding method in which babies received only breastmilk since birth. In 2004/05, approximately one in 10 respondents exclusively breastfed their babies to six-months of age. This duration rate varied according to country of birth, whether it was the mother's first child and Post-Partum Screening Tool scores.

Reasons for Stopping Breastfeeding

The single most commonly reported reason for stopping breastfeeding was 'not having enough breastmilk' (43.6%), followed by 'baby seemed hungry/not satisfied' (22.2%) and 'not enough time/too busy' (12.6%).

Plans to Continue Breastfeeding

Intended breastfeeding duration has been found to be a strong predictor of actual length of breastfeeding. Almost half (46%) of mothers still breastfeeding at six-months post-partum planned to stop breastfeeding before their child was 12-months old.

Return to Work

The majority (72%) of mothers who breastfed their newborns had worked outside of the home during this most recent pregnancy. Mothers who had already returned to work at the time of the survey indicated that they returned to work when their baby was between one and six months old, with an average of 3.8 months. Approximately two-thirds (68%) of these mothers reportedly breastfed when they went back to work or school.

Breastfeeding Supports and Use of Breastfeeding Resources

Respondents who had breastfed were asked who or what gave them the most support with breastfeeding. The most commonly reported supports were hospital staff (29%), their partner/spouse (28%) and relatives (27%). The proportion of mothers reporting selected sources of support varied with characteristics of the mother.

Awareness of Breastfeeding Services by Mother's Breastfeeding Status

Awareness of selected breastfeeding services varied between mothers who breastfed and those who did not. Mothers who had breastfed their infants were more likely to be aware of hospital staff (92.7%), lactation consultants (65.3%) and La Leche League (42.4%) compared to mothers who had not breastfed their infants (86.9%, 51.7% and 18.9% respectively).

Use of Breastfeeding Resources/Services Among Mothers Who Breastfed

Respondents who had breastfed their newborn were asked to indicate which breastfeeding services they used with their newborn and which they were still currently using at the time of the six-month survey. The majority of respondents (84.3%) reported that they used hospital staff as breastfeeding services with their newborn. The second most commonly used service with newborns was 'doctor' (36.2%) followed by 'lactation consultant' (30.6%), Breastfeeding Clinic PHN (28.5%), Peel Breastfeeding Helpline (27.7%), Healthy Start PHN (24.0%) and Healthy Babies Healthy Children PHN (11.4%). The remaining services were less commonly used. At six-months post partum, most (76.9%) respondents were not using any breastfeeding services.

Use of Resources/Services Among Mothers Who Did Not Breastfeed

The majority of respondents who had not breastfed their newborn reported that they used hospital staff (78.0%) with their newborn, followed by a 'doctor' (46.4%) and 'Health Line Peel' (8.1%). Almost one-in-five respondents (17.6%) indicated that they used none of the mentioned services with their newborn.

Comfort with Breastfeeding in Selected Environments

Nine out of 10 mothers (90%) reportedly breastfed in the presence of close family. Of those who did, 94% felt comfortable doing so. Although a smaller proportion of mothers (70%) breastfed in the presence of friends, the vast majority of them (95%) also felt comfortable doing so. In addition to this, the next most commonly reported places in which mothers breastfed were: in malls

(51%), in restaurants (34%), in or at recreational facilities (28%), in places of worship (18%), in the workplace (22%) and on public transportation (3%).

Reasons for Not Breastfeeding in Public Places

Respondents who did not report having breastfed in selected public places were asked to indicate why they did not breastfeed in such a public place. The most common reported reasons were that they did not feel comfortable (45%), 'the situation never arose' (43%) and that they pumped milk so they fed the baby by bottle (10%).

Results- 12-Month Post-Partum Survey

Almost half (48%) of mothers who were still breastfeeding at six months post-partum were continuing to breastfeed to at least 12 months. Of the mothers who were still breastfeeding at six-months post-partum, 8% were still exclusively breastfeeding at the time of the 12-month survey, although this is not recommended as infants require solid food to be introduced at the age of six months. Most mothers stopped exclusively breastfeeding between 4 months to less than 7 months.

Reasons for Stopping Breastfeeding between Six and 12 Months Post-Partum

The single most commonly reported reason for stopping breastfeeding between six- and 12-months post-partum was 'not having enough breastmilk' (26%), followed by 'baby old enough / right time' (23%), 'returned to work' (20%), 'baby seemed hungry/not satisfied' (19%), and 'other' (16%).

Return to Work or School

Respondents who breastfed babies for six to 12 months who participated in the 12-month survey were also asked questions related to returning to work or school. Mothers who had already returned to work at the time of the survey indicated that they returned to work when their baby was between one and 12 to 13 months old, with an average of 9.3 months. Approximately two-thirds (64%) of these mothers reportedly breastfed when they went back to work or school.

Breastfeeding Supports and Use of Breastfeeding Resources – 12-Month Survey

Respondents who reported that they planned to continue breastfeeding after they return to work or who had already returned to work and continued breastfeeding were asked to indicate who or what gave them the most support with

breastfeeding. The most commonly reported supports were their partner/spouse (37%), relatives (37%) and hospital staff (15%).

Awareness of Breastfeeding Services – Among Mothers Who Breastfed to Between Six and 12-Months

Mothers who participated in the 12-month survey, were asked if they were aware of selected breastfeeding services. Almost all mothers (96%) reported being aware of 'hospital staff', followed by 'doctor' (88%), 'Peel Breastfeeding Helpline' (83%), 'Healthy Start Public Health Nurse' (78%), 'Breastfeeding Clinics Public Health Nurse' (76%), and 'lactation consultant' (73%). Most mothers were also aware of other services. Awareness was lowest for the 'Mothers at Breastfeeding Support Group' (39%) and the 'Mothers at Breastfeeding Companion Program' (27%). The proportion of respondents who were aware of selected services varied with selected characteristics of the mother.

Use of Breastfeeding Resources/Services Among Mothers Who Breastfed

Respondents who participated in the 12-month survey, were asked to indicate which breastfeeding services they used within the six-months prior to the survey and which services they were currently using. The majority of respondents (73%) reported that they did not use any of the services during the previous six months and 90% were not using any of the services at the time of the survey.

Comfort with Breastfeeding in Selected Environments Between Six and 12 Months Post-Partum

Approximately nine out of 10 mothers (91%) reported having breastfed in the presence of close family between six- and 12-months post-partum. Of those who did, 97% felt comfortable doing so. Although a smaller proportion of mothers (81%) breastfed in the presence of friends, the vast majority of them (98%) also felt comfortable doing so. The next most commonly reported places in which mothers breastfed were: in malls (69%), in restaurants (51%), in or at recreational facilities (48%), in places of worship (34%), in the workplace (33%) and on public transportation (11%).

Summary

The 2004/05 study found an overall breastfeeding initiation rate of 94%, a six month duration rate of 58% and an exclusive breastfeeding rate at six months of about 10%. The factors impacting these rates are well explained in the body of the report. Of the women breastfeeding at six months, almost half of them (49%) were still breastfeeding at 12 months. When asked how long they planned to continue, many (29%) planned to stop at 13 months, some (12.4%) at 18 months and still others (14%) at 24 months.

While this study was a follow-up to a 2000 breastfeeding survey, there are important methodological differences between the 2000 and 2004/05 surveys which limit the ability to make comparisons. As we continue to survey this population in the coming years we will be able to build on the foundation of the 2004/05 survey.

There are a number of breastfeeding programs and community initiatives in the Region of Peel. These programs provide the full spectrum of breastfeeding promotion from direct service to advocacy and health education. Although the last few years have seen an increase in the number of services available, this increase does not keep pace with the Region's large birth cohort and continued population growth. The recommendations (see page 64) should be taken into consideration by health care providers and community agencies as they strive to meet the needs of Peel's growing population.