

Infant Feeding in Renfrew County and District October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2016: Summary Report

Executive Summary

Introduction

Breast milk is the ideal food for infants, and breastfeeding has many important benefits for both mothers and babies. Health Canada recommends exclusive breastfeeding for about six months, and continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary foods for two years or longer.

Renfrew County and District Health Unit is designated as a *Baby Friendly Initiative* (BFI) facility. This means that we follow steps recommended by BFI to support, promote and protect breastfeeding. This includes supporting all families with feeding their children in a safe and nurturing way, regardless of feeding method.

BFI requires the Health Unit to monitor breastfeeding rates and trends in our community. The purpose of the Health Unit's infant feeding surveillance program is to assess progress in breastfeeding initiation and duration rates, and to provide information that can be used to guide improvements in programs and services.

This report summarizes findings from the first two years of infant feeding surveillance, from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2016. It includes information about breastfeeding initiation and duration rates; introduction of formula, other liquids, and solids; influences on feeding practices; and use of infant feeding services.

Methodology

Infant feeding surveillance was done through telephone surveys with new mothers. Mothers who consented to participate in these surveys were contacted when their babies reached the age of two weeks, two months and six months. Mothers who were still breastfeeding at six months were contacted again when their babies reached the age of one year. Surveys were conducted by Public Health Nurses, who made up to three attempts to reach participants for each survey.

849 mothers participated in the two-week survey. 601 of these mothers went on to participate in the two-month survey, and 454 mothers completed the six-month survey during the study period. 119 mothers completed the one-year survey between October 8, 2015 and September 30, 2016.

Results

Demographics

- The average age of mothers was 29.
- For 45% of mothers, this was their first child.
- Of the 462 mothers with other children, 88% had breastfed before.
- Most mothers (74%) had a post-secondary diploma or degree.
- Of the mothers who were asked their household income, 24% responded “Don’t know” and 5% declined to answer. \$60,000-\$89,999 was the most common income range (20% of those who were asked the question).
- 65% of mothers were married and 27% were in common law relationships.
- 72% of mothers were from the municipalities of Arnprior, Pembroke, Petawawa, or Renfrew while 28% were from other locations in Renfrew County and District.

Key findings about breastfeeding initiation

- 91% of survey participants initiated breastfeeding.
- The most common reasons for not initiating breastfeeding were not wanting to breastfeed, concerns about not having enough breast milk, and previous breastfeeding experience.

Key findings about breastfeeding duration

- 80% of mothers surveyed at two weeks planned to continue breastfeeding until their baby reached a specific age. The most common age when mothers planned to stop breastfeeding was 10 to 12 months.
- At two weeks, half of mothers had been exclusively breastfeeding since birth and over one third were providing non-exclusive breastfeeding.
- At six months, 3% of mothers had been exclusively breastfeeding since birth and 66% were providing non-exclusive breastfeeding.
- The proportion of mothers who were breastfeeding exclusively increased from year one to year two of the study period
- Mothers exclusively breastfeeding at two weeks were more likely to be older, more educated, married, and have a higher household income.
- Mothers providing any breastfeeding at six months were more likely to be older, more educated, and be married or in a common-law relationship.
- Based on mothers who completed all three of the two-week, two-month and six-month surveys, the largest decreases in the proportion of mothers exclusively breastfeeding were between hospital discharge and one week of age, and between four and six months of age.
- 56% of mothers who were breastfeeding at six months were still breastfeeding when surveyed at one year.

- The most common reason mothers stopped breastfeeding between six months and one year was returning to work.
- Mothers who were still breastfeeding at one year planned to continue breastfeeding until their baby self-weaned (36%) or reached a specific age (42%).
- 6% of mothers still breastfeeding at one year planned to continue until two years.

Key findings about the introduction of formula

- 30% of mothers living in Renfrew County and District who gave birth during the study period introduced formula before discharge from hospital or before three days (home births).
- By two weeks after birth almost 50% of mothers surveyed had provided formula to their baby.
- At six months 70% of mothers surveyed had used formula to feed their baby.

Key findings about difficulties or concerns with breastfeeding, reasons for stopping breastfeeding and reasons for first giving formula

- The most common difficulties or concerns in the first two weeks of breastfeeding were issues with latching, sore nipples, and not enough breast milk. After two weeks, the most common concern was not enough breast milk.
- Mothers who stopped breastfeeding by two weeks most commonly reported sore nipples and baby not latching properly and as reasons they stopped.
- Not enough breast milk was frequently identified as a difficulty or concern with breastfeeding, a reason for stopping breastfeeding and a reason for first giving formula, particularly at two months and six months.

Key findings about the introduction of other liquids and solid foods

- 8% of mothers provided a liquid other than breast milk, formula, vitamins, or medication by two weeks of age. Sugar water was the liquid most frequently provided.
- By six months, 54% of mothers had introduced other liquids.
- The earliest that solids were introduced was two months, and 93% mothers surveyed had introduced solids by six months of age.
- The most common reason mothers began providing solids was because their baby showed signs of readiness for solid foods.
- Health care provider recommendations for the time to introduce solids ranged from four to six months.

Key findings about services to help with breastfeeding

- At the two-week survey, 25% of mothers reported using at least one service to help with breastfeeding. At two months, 18% had used these services and at six months 18% reported accessing services.

- The most common service accessed within the first two weeks was home visiting from a Public Health Nurse.
- After two weeks, the most common service accessed was consultation with a health care provider (doctor/nurse practitioner/midwife/doula).
- The public health services most frequently accessed by mothers were home visits from a Public Health Nurse, and Public Health Drop-in program.
- The non-public health services most frequently accessed were health care providers, Drop-in program, and breastfeeding clinics.

Discussion

Breastfeeding initiation and duration rates are low in relation to recommendations. The times when the greatest increases in exclusive breastfeeding could potentially be made are before birth (intention), in hospital, during the week after discharge from hospital, and between four and six months.

Main issues identified through infant feeding surveillance were: early supplementation with formula, especially in hospital and right after coming home from hospital (in the first week), lack of confidence in mothers' milk supply, early stopping of breastfeeding, and the early introduction of liquids other than breast milk and formula.

Mothers exclusively breastfeeding at two weeks were more likely to be older, more educated, married, and have a higher household income. Mothers providing any breastfeeding at six months were more likely to be older, more education, and be married or in a common law relationship. This indicates that new mothers who are younger, less educated, unmarried with lower incomes are a priority for appropriate breastfeeding supports.

Recommendations

- 1) Continue with infant feeding surveillance and analyse the data after a further two-year period.
- 2) Address the discrepancy between the proportion of new mothers who intended to breastfeed exclusively (81%) and the much lower proportion who exclusively breastfed at hospital discharge (70%), two weeks (49%) and two months (40%).
- 3) Develop an understanding of the needs of women who are less likely to breastfeed exclusively at two weeks and less likely to provide any breast milk at six months. Modify infant feeding services to better meet their needs.
- 4) Explore ways of promoting and supporting longer duration of breastfeeding (two years and beyond).