



Genesee County Health Department

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RE: Breastfeeding Is Good For Genesee County and Michigan

The establishment of breastfeeding as a cultural norm is fundamental to promoting wellness. The benefits of breastfeeding to both mother and baby are widely acknowledged.

The nation's Healthy People 2010 goal is for 75% of mothers to breastfeed in the early postpartum period and for 50% of mothers to continue breastfeeding for at least 6 months. In 2005, 67.4 percent of Michigan infants were breastfed, and only 33 percent of 6 month olds were receiving human milk. Among infants in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, 49.95 percent initiated breastfeeding, but only 9.38 percent were still doing so six months later. In Genesee County, the rates were lower—40.51 percent and 5.55 percent, respectively.

In an effort to promote greater awareness, August 2007 has been proclaimed as Breastfeeding Awareness Month in Michigan. Locally, the Genesee County Health Department's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program will celebrate Breastfeeding Awareness Month by offering gift incentives

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to breastfeeding moms and pregnant women who plan to nurse their babies.

Michigan's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program 2007 Breastfeeding Awareness Month theme is "Michigan Families.... Breastfeed With Pride." It encourages families to embrace the optimal health benefits of breastfeeding and strives to increase public support and acceptance of breastfeeding as the infant feeding norm.

A recent report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) confirms that breastfeeding is associated with fewer episodes of diarrhea during infancy, decreased incidence of childhood leukemia, and fewer cases of sudden infant death syndrome. The findings also conclude there is good evidence that breastfeeding reduces infants' risk of ear infections by up to 50 percent and serious lower respiratory tract infections by 72 percent . Children with a family history of asthma who have been breastfed were 40 percent less likely to have asthma. The risk of developing both Type I and Type II Diabetes is also reduced by breastfeeding.

For health outcomes in mothers, there is good evidence that women who do not breastfeed their infants have increased risk of Type II Diabetes, Ovarian Cancer, and Breast Cancer.

Encouraging mothers to breastfeed their infants and encouraging the community to support breastfeeding are important steps in health promotion in Genesee County and Michigan. The benefits include not only a healthier population, but also a significant reduction in health care costs now and in the future.

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