

BC Baby-Friendly Network Position Statement

Breastfeeding is the unequalled way of contributing to the optimal physical, cognitive and emotional growth and development of children. Human milk, with its unique enzymes, immunological and anti-inflammatory properties, growth factors and hormones protect infants from respiratory infections, otitis media, diarrhea, bacteremia, urinary tract infections, gastroenteritis, and possibly Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Exclusive breastfeeding for about six months has been associated with preventing and/or delaying the onset of such diseases as insulin dependent diabetes mellitus, Crohn's, ulcerative colitis, lymphoma and allergic diseases in childhood, and contributing to enhanced cognitive development. Breastfeeding exclusively to the middle of the first year, followed by breastfeeding and complementary foods to two years of age or beyond, is the recommended norm for feeding infants and young children.

Breastfeeding women benefit from enhanced postpartum uterine involution, delayed return of menstruation and fertility and greater protection from premenopausal breast cancer, osteoporosis and ovarian cancer. Families benefit from breastfeeding from lowered costs of feeding infants, less illness-related stress and fewer medical expenses. Society benefits from breastfeeding as there is less demand on the healthcare system, lowered healthcare costs, less illness-related workplace absenteeism by working parents and less environmental pollution.

Families have the right to timely and accurate information that allows them to make informed choices about feeding their infants. Mothers' who choose to breastfeed should have a supportive environment, free from barriers that undermine confidence and abilities to establish and maintain breastfeeding. Knowledgeable, skilled individuals to assist with breastfeeding should be available to mothers as their need is identified. Breastfeeding mothers who choose to return to work or school or are challenged to meet family or societal obligations (e.g. elder care, community volunteerism, jury duty) have the right to support that will enable them to continue to breastfeed.

A breastfeeding culture that promotes, protects and supports breastfeeding is one in which all sectors of society value breastfeeding and accept it as the normal way to feed infants. To facilitate attainment of this culture, breastfeeding education should be provided throughout society and included in all educational curricula.

The Baby-Friendly Initiative helps to ensure that breastfeeding is promoted, protected and supported. All hospitals and communities in British Columbia should work towards the attainment of meeting the criteria of the Baby-Friendly Initiative.

The BC Baby-Friendly Network Endorses:

WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes (1981)

Joint WHO/UNICEF Statement on Protecting, Promoting, and Supporting Breast Feeding (1989)

Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding

WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (1991)