



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



Higher Breastfeeding Rates Are Good News

More and more mothers are breastfeeding every year. That's the good news. Many others however still need encouragement, not only to start, but also to continue for a longer time.

Exclusive breastfeeding until six months of age is recommended by both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization. For babies, the health benefits are well known—protection against infections and disease; lower asthma, diabetes, heart disease and obesity rates; and even higher IQs. For mothers, the risk of breast and ovarian cancers, diabetes and osteoporosis are all reduced. Sounds like it's a good idea for everyone!

The 2012 breastfeeding "report card," released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), showed 77 percent of mothers nationwide breastfeed after birth. The numbers in Putnam County's Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program are even better with 84 percent of women at least initiating breastfeeding. The rate for continued breastfeeding through six months, however, is approximately 53 percent in New York State—better than the national average of 47 percent, but falling short of the science-based Healthy People 2020 goal of 60.6 percent.

Why is such a beneficial practice, for both mothers and children, not reaching desired levels? One chief explanation is that most hospitals do not satisfactorily support breastfeeding and getting off to a good start is crucial. The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, launched by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, aims to improve hospital support worldwide. Baby-Friendly USA accredits U.S. hospitals that effectively give mothers the necessary skills, information and confidence to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is so beneficial that when expectant mothers are considering where to give birth, they should select hospitals that support breastfeeding.

Achieving the "Baby Friendly" designation is a high honor. Only 154 hospitals in the nation have attained this distinction, including 4 in New York State. Last February, Hudson Valley Hospital Center in Cortlandt Manor became the fifth, and the only facility between New York City and Syracuse to achieve this impressive credential.

The Maternal Child Health public health nurses at the Department of Health have considerable expertise in lactation counseling. They make home visits for new moms in our County without any cost to the patient and their assistance can be invaluable in establishing this important and healthy practice. Free breastfeeding support groups with a Certified Lactation Counselor are also held twice a month, in Carmel and in Brewster. Walk-ins are welcome at either two hour session. Call 845-808-1390, extension 43150, for further information.

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