Ensuring every child has the Best Start in Life is one of PHE’s national priorities

Breastfeeding is an important public health priority

Supporting families to breastfeed and increasing the number of babies who are breastfed gives babies the best possible start

This resource has been developed in partnership between PHE and Unicef UK and is to be read in conjunction with parts 2 and 3
Breastfeeding in England

The UK government recommends exclusive breastfeeding for around 6 months and thereafter with other foods.

- 74% of mothers start to breastfeed\(^2\)
- 44% are breastfeeding at 6 weeks\(^3\)
- 36% are breastfeeding at 6 months\(^4\)

Only 1% of babies are exclusively breastfed until they are 6 months old\(^5\)

Mothers who are young, white, from routine and manual professions and who left education early are least likely to breastfeed\(^6\)
Breastfeeding benefits the baby from top to toe\textsuperscript{7,8,9}

Not breastfeeding is linked to an increased risk of

- ear infections (otitis media)
- tooth decay & dental malocclusion
- chest infections (lower respiratory infections)
- diarrhoea & vomiting (gastroenteritis)
- death from gut infections in sick and premature babies (necrotising enterocolitis)
- overweight/obesity later in life
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

There is evidence to suggest there may be a link between breastfeeding and educational attainment.

Breastfeeding supports close and loving relationships which helps the baby’s brain development.
Maternal health benefits of breastfeeding

There is good evidence to suggest that breastfeeding decreases the risk of breast cancer.

There is some evidence to suggest that breastfeeding protects against ovarian cancer.

Breastfeeding supports close and loving relationships, improves mental health, and can reduce the risk of postnatal depression.
Breastfeeding reduces overweight and obesity

There is growing evidence linking breastfeeding with protection against later overweight/obesity\textsuperscript{13}

A recent meta-analysis suggests breastfeeding is associated with a 13\% reduction in the prevalence of child overweight or obesity

Child obesity in England costs approximately £51 million per year and into adulthood, £588-686 million per annum\textsuperscript{14}
Breastfeeding in a global context

Rates of any breastfeeding at 6 months:15
- Senegal – 99%
- US – 49%
- UK – 34%

Globally, not breastfeeding is estimated to account for16:
- 823,000 baby deaths a year
- 20,000 breast cancer deaths in women a year
- Lower population intelligence which costs society $302 billion annually
The cost of low breastfeeding rates in England

76% of all babies have had formula milk by 6 weeks\textsuperscript{17}

The cost to the NHS every year of treating just 5 illnesses linked to babies not being breastfed is at least £48 million\textsuperscript{18}:

- ear infection
- chest infection
- gut infection
- necrotising enterocolitis
  (gut infection in premature babies)
- breast cancer
Breastfeeding supports families and communities

Breastfeeding can help to reduce health inequalities for babies and improve their life chances.

Breastfeeding can support family budgets – less illness and time off work, feeds babies for significantly less.

Families benefit from the inherent relationship building that breastfeeding brings.
Why mothers in England don’t breastfeed

Only 36% of babies in England\textsuperscript{20} are receiving some breastmilk at 6 months compared to 71% of Norwegian babies\textsuperscript{21}

Eight out of ten women stop breastfeeding before they want to and could have continued with more support\textsuperscript{22}

Many English mothers feel unsupported and find breastfeeding

- very difficult
- not acceptable in public
- difficult to combine with work and lifestyles

Families live in a culture where formula feeding is seen as normal and nearly as good as breastfeeding
Our ambition for England

Breastfeeding is seen as normal and supported by everyone – in our public services and in the home, out and about and when returning to work.
What needs to be done

1. Raise awareness that breastfeeding matters
2. Provide effective professional support to mothers and their families
3. Ensure that mothers have access to support, encouragement and understanding in their community
4. Restrict the promotion of formula milks and baby foods
Raising awareness that breastfeeding matters

1-2-1 empathetic and mother-centred antenatal conversations with midwives and health visitors

Antenatal classes, for all parents, that provide holistic approaches to loving and feeding babies

Local health promotion campaigns and education for all
Provide effective professional support to mothers and their families \(^{30,31,32,33}\)

Every maternity unit, health visiting service, neonatal unit and children’s centre should be implementing the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative standards, and ensure that universities are teaching their future health professionals to Unicef UK Baby Friendly standards.
Ensure that mothers have access to support in their community

Provide mother to mother support schemes – telephone, one-to-one and groups

Encourage Welcome to Breastfeed schemes in all public spaces, anywhere, anytime

Support employers to implement policies, practices and environments that support mothers to breastfeed during study and work
Restrict the advertising of formula milks and baby foods

All maternity, health visiting, neonatal and children’s centre services should implement the Unicef UK Baby Friendly standards

Prohibit advertising in local authority facilities

Support your trading standards teams by reporting violations of the UK law in your local area
References


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