



Latch On NYC

A hospital-based initiative to support a mother's decision to breastfeed

Background

- Breastfeeding is a healthier choice than infant formula for mothers and babies.
 - Breastfeeding reduces a mother's risk of breast and ovarian cancers.
 - Breastfeeding reduces an infant's risk of ear, respiratory and gastrointestinal infections, and asthma, and promotes maternal bonding and optimal growth and development.
- Formula feeding markedly increases serious health risks for infants, including:
 - 257% excess risk of hospitalization for lower respiratory infection
 - 178% excess risk of diarrhea and vomiting
 - 100% excess risk of acute ear infections
 - 67% excess risk of asthma for infants with a family history of asthma (35% for infants with no family history of asthma)
- Ninety percent (90%) of NYC mothers start breastfeeding. However, by the time the baby reaches two months, only 31% of NYC mothers are still exclusively breastfeeding. These suboptimal rates result in excess health care costs and preventable infant illness and death.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend exclusive breastfeeding until an infant is six months old to obtain the full health benefits for mothers and infants.
- In 2011, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a *Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding*, identifying key actions to improve support of breastfeeding, including ensuring "that the marketing of infant formula is conducted in a way that minimizes its negative impacts on exclusive breastfeeding."
- The top three reasons mothers give for discontinuing breastfeeding can be addressed through adequate education and support during pregnancy, at delivery and after childbirth:
 - "I thought I was not producing enough milk" (47%)
 - "Breast milk alone did not satisfy my baby" (44%)
 - "My baby had difficulty latching or nursing" (27%)
- While New York State (NYS) regulations state that breastfeeding infants should not be supplemented with formula feedings in the hospital unless medically indicated, 93% of NYC births occur in hospitals where healthy breastfed infants are supplemented with infant formula. In a nationwide ranking of states, NYS ranks next to worst in breastfed infants receiving supplementary formula in the hospital.
- Infant formula promotion interferes with breastfeeding.
 - Women who choose to breastfeed are less likely to exclusively breastfeed and breastfeed for a shorter duration if their newborn infants receive formula supplementation or receive hospital discharge packs with formula.
 - Distribution of infant formula promotional items through medical providers and institutions sends mixed messages to mothers about their ability to successfully breastfeed.

- Giving infant formula to a breastfed baby, particularly in the first few days after birth, decreases an infant's ability to breastfeed on demand and can reduce a mother's milk supply.
- When hospitals stop promoting infant formula, mothers are more likely to exclusively breastfeed their babies.
 - After Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) hospitals discontinued providing infant formula samples at hospital discharge and implemented other practices to support breastfeeding, the exclusive breastfeeding rate at eight weeks following delivery increased by 21%, with no change in rates for mothers delivering at non-HHC facilities.

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- On May 9th, the City launched **Latch On NYC**, an initiative to support mothers choosing to breastfeed. The goal is to improve the health of mothers and children by increasing breastfeeding initiation and duration, and exclusive breastfeeding.
 - Women need accurate information and support to make their own decisions about how to feed their babies.
 - If a mother chooses to breastfeed, we want to support her decision and eliminate practices that can interfere with her ability to successfully breastfeed.
- The initiative includes the following components:
 - A call to all NYC maternity hospitals to make a voluntary commitment to support mothers who choose to breastfeed by providing additional support to breastfeeding mothers and minimize practices that can interfere with that choice such as supplementing breastfeeding infants with formula, unless medically indicated or at the mother's specific request. Hospitals also pledge to end the distribution of promotional formula and materials during the hospital stay and at discharge.
 - A public awareness campaign to promote the health benefits of breast milk, and to inform women of their right to receive education, encouragement and support to breastfeed their babies if they choose to do so.
- Mothers who decide to formula feed and cannot afford formula will be referred to WIC (Women, Infants and Children), a food and nutrition program for low-income families.
- The New York City health community has joined together to endorse this new initiative.
 - 29 hospitals have already signed on to make the commitment.
 - The initiative has been endorsed by the New York State Department of Health, the Greater New York Hospital Association, Health and Hospitals Corporation, and the NYS chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Academy of Family Physicians and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine.