

Alaska Obesity Facts: Breastfeeding in Alaska

WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT BREASTFEEDING?

There is strong evidence that breastfeeding delivers health benefits to both mother and child.

Infants who breastfeed

Breastfeeding provides infants protection against multiple illnesses and chronic conditions.

Breastfed babies:

- are less likely to acquire respiratory infections including RSV,^{1,2} and
- are less likely to acquire infectious diseases³ or die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).⁴

Children breastfed as babies:

- have lower rates of acute otitis media, gastroenteritis, asthma, leukemia, and type 1 and 2 diabetes⁵ than do children who were formula fed; and
- have decreased risk for childhood and adult obesity.^{5,6}

Women who breastfeed:

- have reduced risk for type 2 diabetes, and both breast and ovarian cancer;⁵ and
- miss less work because of fewer infant illnesses compared to women who formula-feed.⁷

Unfortunately, despite the many advantages to mother, infant, and the employer, many women who initiate breastfeeding and return to the workforce discontinue breastfeeding within the first month of their return.^{8,9} From a national sample, Ryan et al. found that by 6 months after delivery, 26.1% of mothers employed full time, 36.6% of mothers working part time, and 35.0% of nonworking mothers still breastfed their infant.¹⁰

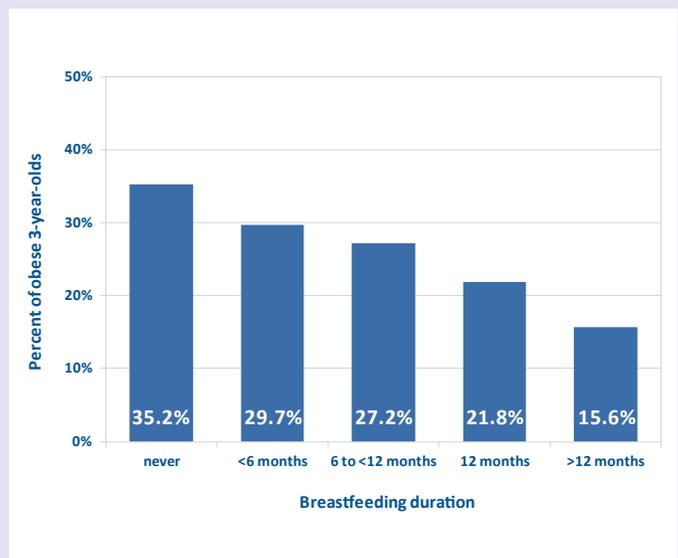
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS (AAP) RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve optimal health benefits from breastfeeding for mother and child, AAP recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a baby's life, followed by breastfeeding in combination with the introduction of complementary foods until at least 12 months of age, with the continuation of breastfeeding for as long as it is desirable for both mother and baby.¹¹

BREASTFEEDING IN ALASKA

- The percent of mothers who initiated breastfeeding increased significantly in Alaska over the past two decades, from 79% in 1991 to 93% in 2010.¹²
- By 8 weeks postpartum, 73% of women who gave birth are breastfeeding.¹²
- By 12 months, only 15% are meeting the AAP recommendation of breastfeeding for a year.¹³

PERCENT OF 3-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN WITH A BMI ≥ 95TH PERCENTILE (OBESE), BY LENGTH OF TIME MOTHER BREASTFED CHILD



SOURCE: ALASKA CUBS 2009-2011¹³

- The longer the duration of breastfeeding, the lower the prevalence of obesity among 3-year-olds in Alaska.
 - Among children who were never breastfed, 35% were obese by age 3. Among children who were breastfed for the AAP-recommended 12 months, 22% were obese by age 3.
 - Among children who were breastfed longer than 12 months, 16% were obese by age 3.

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HOW CAN WE INCREASE BREASTFEEDING INITIATION AND DURATION IN ALASKA?

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative is a worldwide program of the World Health Organization and UNICEF proven to increase breastfeeding.¹⁴ To earn the Baby Friendly Hospital designation, hospitals must implement a suite of evidence-based maternity care policies and practices. Of the 24 eligible hospitals and birth centers in Alaska, only 1 has earned the Baby Friendly designation.

What Can Women, Friends and Family Members Do?

- Learn about the importance of breastfeeding.
- Support women in their decision to breastfeed.
- Seek support for breastfeeding from a lactation consultant.
- Follow the AAP recommendations and breastfeed for at least 12 months.

What Can Health Care Providers Do?

- Get training in breastfeeding support techniques.
- Encourage breastfeeding and provide direct support to women who breastfeed.

- Support adoption of Baby Friendly policies and practices and the designation at hospitals and birthing centers.
- Eliminate the provision of formula in hospitals and birthing centers for non-medical reasons.
- Refer women to lactation specialists and consultants as needed.

What Can Alaska Worksites and Communities Do?

- **Worksites:**
 - Provide dedicated and appropriate breastfeeding or pumping space for breastfeeding employees.
 - Develop and enforce worksite lactation support policies.
 - Allow breastfeeding women flexible and reasonable break times.
 - Provide refrigeration/cooler for breast milk storage.
- **Communities:**
 - Support and offer classes on breastfeeding.
 - Develop and strengthen programs that provide support to mothers through peer counseling.
 - Support breastfeeding through public campaigns.
 - Ensure local laws do not prohibit or restrict a woman breastfeeding her child in a public or private location.¹⁵
 - Adhere to Alaska state laws which protect a woman's ability to breastfeed in public.

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<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Pages/Obesity/default.aspx>

