



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Breastfeeding can reduce infant infections and health care costs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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During August, Breastfeeding Awareness Month, a variety of stakeholders in Alabama and the nation are coming out in support of breastfeeding which offers natural health benefits to both mother and child.

Breastfeeding is important because research has shown that it supports optimal growth and it provides lifelong advantages to infants and their mothers. Infants who are not breastfed are more likely to experience more frequent infections and other health problems such as an increased risk for childhood-onset diabetes and obesity. Breastfeeding mothers have a lower incidence of osteoporosis, breast cancer and other health-related risks.

The Medical Association of the State of Alabama has adopted a resolution in support of breastfeeding. Along with colleagues in the American Academy of Pediatrics, Alabama Chapter, and the Alabama Section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. These physician groups have established a State Breastfeeding Committee.

The committee's objectives are to institute measures to improve the breastfeeding rate, especially for Medicaid infants, through provider and public education activities. Promotion and support must be addressed aggressively by all providers to ensure that infants and mothers receive the many benefits of breastfeeding,

Alabama physicians addressing a news conference in support of breastfeeding include members of the Alabama Breastfeeding Committee: Dr. Jeff Collins, an obstetrician in Anniston, Dr. Lewis Doggett, a pediatrician in Anniston; and Dr. Marsha Raulerson, a pediatrician in Brewton. This committee was created because of the very low breastfeeding rates statewide.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "We are pleased that the percentage of mothers in Alabama who initiate breastfeeding has increased to 58 percent, up from 43 percent 10 years ago. Although the initiation rate has increased, Alabama continues to rank near the bottom in comparison to other states."

The Alabama Legislature recently affirmed mothers' rights to breastfeed in public places with the passage of a law sponsored by State Rep. Laura Hall of Huntsville. Regional

breastfeeding committees and a combination of other grassroots organizations have worked to ensure a mother can breastfeed in public without fear of retribution.

"We encourage Alabama employers to allow breastfeeding in their workplace," Williamson stated. "Benefits include lower health care costs amounting to \$400 per baby over the first year as well as reduced absenteeism and higher morale. A lack of support in breaking barriers to breastfeeding also affects breastfeeding duration rates."

The Alabama Department of Public Health is celebrating Breastfeeding Awareness Month with the placement of billboards thanking mothers who breastfed their babies. The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) has led the department in the support of breastfeeding mothers for more than 25 years.

WIC provides prenatal counseling on the benefits of breastfeeding, breastfeeding supplies and pumps, and allows breastfeeding mothers to continue to receive benefits for up to one year after the baby's birth if the mother continues to breastfeed.

Last year, WIC began a breastfeeding peer counseling program in three pilot counties. In less than one year, these counties have seen significant increases in breastfeeding rates in their WIC population.

The peer counseling program employs present or former WIC participants who have breastfed their babies. After extensive training, these counselors can provide support to pregnant and postpartum mothers regarding breastfeeding. Plans to expand the program to other counties are underway.

The Healthy People 2010 objectives of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are as follows:

- To have at least 75 percent of mothers breastfeed their infants in the early postpartum period,
- To have 50 percent continue breastfeeding through 6 months of age
- For 25 percent to continue breastfeeding at 1 year of age.

For more information contact Michell Grainger, M.S.N., R.N.C., I.B.C.L.C., State Lactation Coordinator, WIC Program, Bureau of Family Health Services, at (334) 206-5673, mgrainger@adph.state.al.us.

8/1/06

PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS CONFERENCE
Tuesday, August 1, 2006
10 a.m. CT

SUBJECT: News conference to announce launch of a campaign to improve mothers' and children's health by promoting breastfeeding. Three practicing physicians in Alabama will discuss this campaign and its importance. Research has shown that breastfeeding supports optimal growth and provides lifelong advantages to infants and their mothers.

Satellite Transmission Information: Tuesday, August 1

Ku Band

Satellite: SBS 6 Orbital Location: 74 degrees West
Transponder: 9 Downlink Frequency: 11921.0 MHz
Polarity: Horizontal Audio: 6.2 - 6.8

C-Band

Satellite: Galaxy 3 Orbital Location: 95 degrees West
Transponder: 23 Downlink Frequency: 4160.0 MHz
Polarity: Horizontal Audio: 6.2-6.8
Tech support for satellite downlink: 800-811-6047 (beginning at 9:45-10 a.m. central).
Satellite set-up time is from 9:50 to 10 a.m. CT. The news conference will begin at 10 CT.

Internet WebCast Information:

Go to www.adph.org/alphntn to view the bullet points
Internet set-up time is from 9:45 – 10 a.m. CT
You must have a Real Player (<http://www.real.com/player>)
Technical support for the webcast: (334) 206-5618.

- Individuals who want to ask questions should call 800-946-6307 during the news conference. This is to ask questions only and is not an audio bridge.
- For more information about satellite feed or WebCast call 334-206-5618.