



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, experts urge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are celebrating August as Breastfeeding Awareness Month. During August, the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action has chosen "Breastfeeding: The First Hour—Save One Million Babies!" as its theme for 2007.

Michell Grainger, state lactation coordinator with the WIC Program, said, "It is important that we provide education to families about the importance of breastfeeding during the first hour after birth. Timely initiation of breastfeeding is beneficial for both the baby and the mother."

Evidence-based practices such as immediate skin-to-skin contact and a quiet environment can help babies softly move toward the breast. Initiating breastfeeding during the first hour makes use of the baby's sucking reflex, which is strongest during the first hour of life.

Breastfeeding offers natural health benefits to both mother and child. Breastfeeding is important because research has shown that it supports optimal growth and provides lifelong advantages to infants and their mothers. Infants who are not breastfed have a greater likelihood of experiencing 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 Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, PRAMS, survey, found that 60 percent of Alabama mothers reported initiating breastfeeding in 2004. Only one-third of Alabama mothers reported breastfeeding during the first hour after birth. Mothers should be encouraged and provided with an opportunity to breastfeed during the first hour after birth.

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.

WIC provides a peer counseling program, which 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 basic 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.

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