



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Twenty-seven Alabama hospitals join Alabama Breastfeeding Initiative

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In 2011, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a national *Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding*. The report recommended widespread community efforts to create a supportive environment for new mothers in order to increase breastfeeding rates and improve the health of the nation.

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials awarded a two-year grant to the Alabama Department of Public Health to increase practices supportive of breastfeeding in birthing facilities. As a result, 27 of the 48 Alabama hospitals that deliver babies have signed an agreement to participate in the Alabama Breastfeeding Initiative. This initiative will have an impact on 65 percent of all births in Alabama and will address improving breastfeeding rates by assisting hospitals to align policies and practices with the “Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding.”

“Breastfeeding is the natural way to feed an infant and provides the healthiest start in life,” State Perinatal Program Director Amy R. Stratton said. “In addition to nutritional benefits, breastfeeding promotes a unique emotional connection between mother and baby and helps reduce illness.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for at least the first six months of a baby’s life and then continuing to breastfeed while also introducing complementary foods. Evidence shows that babies who are breastfed exclusively have fewer infections and respiratory illnesses, a decreased risk of allergies, and are less likely to die of SIDS.

From 2002-2011, the percentage of Alabama mothers who initiated breastfeeding increased six out of the 10 years. In 2014, 67.3 percent of Alabama mothers reported initiating breastfeeding. However, Alabama still falls behind the national rate of 79.2 percent and well below the Healthy People 2020 objective of 81.9 percent.

Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center and East Alabama Medical Center, the state’s two certified Baby-Friendly USA facilities, along with Baptist Health South and UAB, recipients of the Best Fed Beginnings grants from the National Institute for Children’s Health Quality, have agreed to be “mentor” facilities for the other hospitals during the initiative. At this time, 22 delivering hospitals in Alabama have made commitments to pursue Baby-Friendly USA status.

Through the grant, the State Perinatal Program in collaboration with the Alabama Hospital Association and the Alabama Breastfeeding Committee are partnering with delivering hospitals to provide breastfeeding education and resources. In June 2015, 30 nurses and educators attended 40 hours of training and completed a nationally recognized certification exam to become Certified Lactation Counselors. The initiative has worked to build and collect monthly breastfeeding data.

“It is our responsibility to provide education and support to mothers, infants and their families to enable them to have the best possible start in life,” Ms. Stratton said. Year two will focus on supporting providers in efforts to improve breastfeeding practices and education in clinic settings.

For more information about breastfeeding and the Alabama Breastfeeding Initiative please visit www.Adph.org/perinatal
<http://www.babyfriendlyusa.org/about-us/baby-friendly-hospital-initiative/the-ten-steps>
<http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/resources/guide.htm>
<http://www2.aap.org/breastfeeding/>

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