

About Breastfeeding

DECEMBER 9, 2024


KEY POINTS

- Breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition for most infants.
- Breastfeeding can reduce the risk of certain health conditions for both infants and mothers.
- About 1 in 4 infants is exclusively breastfed as recommended until they are 6 months old.
- CDC supports and promotes breastfeeding across the United States.



Breastfeeding benefits babies and mothers

Infants who are breastfed have reduced risk of:

- Asthma.
- Severe lower respiratory disease.
- Obesity.
- Type 1 diabetes.
- Acute otitis media (ear infections).
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Gastrointestinal infections, which can cause diarrhea and vomiting.
- [Necrotizing enterocolitis \(NEC\)](#)  (death of intestinal tissue) for preterm infants.

Breastfeeding can help lower a mother's risk for:

- High blood pressure.
- Type 2 diabetes.
- Ovarian cancer.
- Breast cancer.

Support for breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the clinical gold standard for infant feeding and nutrition. We must do more to create supportive and safe environments for mothers who choose to breastfeed.—Dr. Ruth Petersen, director of CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity



What CDC is doing

We work with state and local organizations to improve [continuity of care in breastfeeding](#). Quality, consistent care over time includes hospital initiatives, worksite accommodation, and community support initiatives. We also collect data to track progress.

We promote best practices in health care settings by:

- Supporting the [Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding](#) ², a global standard to promote breastfeeding in hospitals.
- Encouraging obstetricians, pediatricians, and nurses to educate new mothers about breastfeeding.

We support mothers at work and in their communities by:

- Partnering with states to help employers support breastfeeding mothers with:
 - Places to pump and store breast milk.
 - Flexible work hours.
 - Maternity leave benefits.
- Promoting access to community supports such as peer counseling and supplemental nutrition programs.
- Supporting policies and practices in [early care and education settings](#) to make it easier for mothers to continue to breastfeed their children.

We [collect data](#) to learn how best to improve breastfeeding rates in the United States by:

- Tracking how long infants are breastfed.
- Creating reports that show how well states and hospitals support breastfeeding mothers.



Family support can make a difference in whether and for how long infants are breastfed.

Breastfeeding statistics

- About 1 in 4 infants are exclusively breastfed as recommended by the time they are 6 months old.
- Low rates of breastfeeding add more than \$3 billion a year to U.S. medical costs for the mother and child.
- Three-quarters (75%) of Black infants are ever breastfed, which is below the national average of 84%.

Milestones

In the United States:

- The percentage of babies who start out breastfeeding increased from 73% in 2004 to 84% in 2021.
- The percentage of births in hospitals with recommended maternity care practices that support breastfeeding increased from 3.8% in 2010 to 28.9% in 2021.

Make breastfeeding easier



Only through the support of family, communities, clinicians, health care systems, and employers will we be able to make breastfeeding the easy choice.—Dr. Jerome M. Adams, U.S. Surgeon General (2017-2021)

Resources

[Potential activities for state and local organizations](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding](#)

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

[National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion \(NCCDPHP\)](#)