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DAILY MAIL (London)

August 24, 2011 Wednesday

**BREASTFED BABIES 'ARE NOT PROTECTED AGAINST ECZEMA'**

**BYLINE:** BY JENNY HOPE MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT

**LENGTH:** 407 words

**BREASTFEEDING** may not protect children against developing **eczema**, a study suggests.

Scientists found babies who were exclusively breastfed for four months or longer were just as likely to develop **eczema** as those weaned earlier.

The UK is among European countries that recommends prolonged **breastfeeding** as a means of reducing the risk of childhood **eczema**.

Although the researchers are not disputing the other health benefits breastmilk offers, they say that there is only a 'small protective effect' against severe **eczema** among babies breastfed for less than four months in developed countries.

The experts, based at King's College London, The University of **Nottingham** and the University of Ulm, in Germany, looked at data from 51,119 children aged eight to 12, in 21 countries across Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The study formed phase two of The International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood, the largest research project of its type ever undertaken, in which information on **eczema**, **breastfeeding** and time of weaning was gathered by parental questionnaire.

Children also underwent a skin examination for **eczema** and skin prick testing to environmental allergens, including house dust mites, says the report published online in the British Journal of Dermatology.

The researchers found no evidence for a protective effect of **breastfeeding** and delayed weaning on **eczema** risk in both developed and developing countries.

Dr Carsten Flohr, one of the researchers based at King's College London, said: 'UK **breastfeeding** guidelines with regard to **eczema** should be reviewed.

'Further studies are required to explore how and when solids should be introduced alongside **breastfeeding** to aid protection against **eczema** and other allergic diseases.'

Dr Flohr added that the other benefits of **breastfeeding** on infant health, unrelated to **eczema**, remain important.

The Department of Health recommends exclusive **breastfeeding** for the first six months of life with additional **breastfeeding** while the baby moves on to solids.

Nina Goad, of the British Association of Dermatologists, said: 'The size of this study means that its findings are very significant, although the authors recognise that further studies are needed.

'Following these further studies we may need to review the UK's advice on how long mothers should breastfeed exclusively for, and at what age we should be weaning our infants, in relation to **eczema** prevention.' j.hope@dailymail.co.uk

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