



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
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Dear Colleague,

As it has become tradition to celebrate breastfeeding in the month of August, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, your staff and your colleagues for your efforts to promote and support breastfeeding at your institution. Recently released data from the National Immunization Survey, shows that Massachusetts has met the Healthy People 2010 goal of 75% of infants initiating breastfeeding and 50% of infants breastfeeding at six months of age. The improvement necessary to meet this goal is a public health success, due in large part to the work you and your community partners do every day.

This past year has been an exciting time for breastfeeding in other aspects, as well.

- The Cambridge Birth Center joined Boston Medical Center to become the second institution in the state to earn the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Designation.
- President Obama signed the Healthcare Reform bill which included a section requiring employers to provide reasonable break time and space to express milk for one year after giving birth.
- The Joint Commission approved a new measure that requires hospitals to report the rate of exclusive breastfeeding among mothers who intend to breastfeed.
- The White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity released a report including four recommendations focusing on breastfeeding as an obesity preventive measure.

While this is a time to celebrate achievements, it is also a time to carefully consider areas where we can improve. National Immunization Survey data show that more than one in five breastfeeding infants born in Massachusetts receive formula supplementation before two days of age. Early supplementation, when not medically indicated, can hinder a mother's ability to fully develop her milk supply and prevent her from offering her infant the greatest health benefits that exclusive breastfeeding affords.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released state-specific reports to identify strengths and opportunities identified in its Maternity Practices in Infant Nutrition and Care (mPINC) survey. A copy of Massachusetts' report is attached to this letter. The Commonwealth excelled in practices related to documentation of infant feeding decisions, as well as in the availability of prenatal breastfeeding instruction. Adherence to clinical practice guidelines for formula supplementation, discharge planning for breastfeeding support, rooming-in practices and existence of comprehensive breastfeeding policies were identified as areas needing improvement.

We recognize that changing protocol and procedure can be challenging in the fast-paced environment of maternity care. While achieving the Baby-Friendly Hospital designation is a worthy long-term goal, taking just one step along that path can create meaningful opportunities for breastfeeding support. For example, 32 Massachusetts' birthing hospitals have achieved the milestone of eliminating the practice of disseminating formula company-sponsored gift bags to their patients. (See attached list.) This action supports the message that breastfeeding is the normal, desirable way to feed a newborn.

One successful strategy that maternity care facilities can utilize to solicit input, fuel momentum and ultimately create change to better support breastfeeding is to maintain an active, multidisciplinary breastfeeding task force or committee. The Department of Public Health's third annual Breastfeeding Achievement Awards will honor facilities that support this practice. Facilities will be surveyed this summer and awards will be announced at the Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition conference, co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Chapter of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, held at the Massachusetts Medical Society in Waltham on October 18, 2010. For more information about the conference, visit www.massbreastfeeding.org.

We are sure that you share our commitment to improving breastfeeding outcomes for families in your care. We look forward to working with you to achieve this goal. For more information about the Department's breastfeeding initiatives or to share your ideas about how we can collaborate, please contact Meghan Morse, State Breastfeeding Coordinator, at 617-624-5093 or meghan.morse@state.ma.us. Thank you again for your hard work and dedication to mothers and babies in Massachusetts.

Sincerely,

Lauren Smith, MD, MPH
Medical Director
Massachusetts Department of Public Health