Breastfeeding "Baby-Friendly Initiative" Update

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<th>March 21, 2011</th>
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<td>To:</td>
<td>Board of Health</td>
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<td>From:</td>
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**SUMMARY**

This report is in follow-up to the March 2010 Board of Health report on breastfeeding in Toronto. At that time, the Board of Health approved a number of recommendations related to the achievement of The Breastfeeding Committee for Canada Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) designation by Toronto birthing hospitals and Toronto Public Health.

This report provides the Board of Health with information as requested about the progress to-date of Toronto birthing hospitals in implementing policies and practices which support breastfeeding and advance their efforts to achieve BFI designation. It also provides an update on the progress that Toronto Public Health is making towards BFI designation for community health services.

Despite some significant challenges to achieving BFI in a city the size of Toronto, progress is being made. Collaboration with the hospitals over the past year and a recent informal survey of the hospitals has demonstrated a solid commitment on the part of all hospitals towards improving their breastfeeding policies, practices and training. Toronto Public Health shares that commitment and is also making progress toward achieving BFI designation in 2012. The Medical Officer of Health will report further on progress in 2012 for both hospitals and Toronto Public Health.

**Financial Impact**

There are no financial impacts of these recommendations.

**DECISION HISTORY**

At its January 2007 meeting, the Board of Health approved a report entitled "Supporting Breastfeeding in Toronto" and directed the Medical Officer of Health to develop a breastfeeding report card for the City of Toronto.
At its March 22, 2010 meeting, the Board of Health received a report entitled "Breastfeeding in Toronto: Promoting Supportive Environments". This report included a survey of breastfeeding rates by hospital and compliance with BFI requirements. The report called on Toronto Public Health to work with Toronto birthing hospitals to support their efforts to achieve Baby-Friendly Initiative designation. It also required that Toronto Public Health achieve Community Health Service Baby-Friendly Initiative designation for itself.

The Board of Health requested that the Medical Officer of Health report back to the Board of Health in 2011 on the progress of hospitals in four priority areas, and on both hospital and Toronto Public Health progress overall in 2012.

**ISSUE BACKGROUND**

Breast milk provides the best nutrition for the first six months of life. Breastfeeding also has a variety of well-documented short and longer term benefits for both mother and baby.

The Ontario Public Health Standards require health units to use a comprehensive health promotion approach to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding to six months. One measure of success in achieving this objective is the Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) designation. BFI is an internationally recognized designation initiated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF and advanced in Canada by the Breastfeeding Committee of Canada (BCC). It encourages hospitals and community health services to implement policies and practices that promote, protect and support breastfeeding.

In order to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence and support first time mothers to initiate and continue to breastfeed in Toronto, Toronto Public Health (TPH) conducted a research study between 2007 and 2009. The results of this study were summarized in a report entitled Breastfeeding in Toronto: Promoting Supportive Environments that was presented to the Board in March 2010. This study found that a number of factors including socio-demographic, socio-cultural, birth-related, hospital policies and practices and the community were associated with any and/or exclusive breastfeeding at various points in time.

The study found that almost all first-time mothers initiated breastfeeding in hospital (95.7%) and at six months almost three quarters of these mothers were still breastfeeding (73.3%). However, only 17.5% of mothers who initiated breastfeeding continued to exclusively breastfeeding their babies to six months. This low exclusive breastfeeding rate was particularly concerning given that exclusive breastfeeding to six months (with the introduction of complementary foods at six months and continued breastfeeding for two years of life and beyond) is recommended by a number of organizations including WHO, Health Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and Toronto Public Health.
The Toronto study also included a survey of all birthing hospitals in Toronto. It clearly demonstrated a link between hospital postpartum policies and practices and mothers' breastfeeding rates. Consequently, Toronto birthing hospitals were urged to achieve BFI designation as soon as possible. The study identified the need for hospitals to focus on four priority areas that were identified as independently associated with exclusive breastfeeding and had relatively low levels of implementation in most hospitals. They were:

1. Developing a written policy that covers BCC's *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*, including a mechanism to evaluate the policy
2. Helping mothers initiate breastfeeding within a half hour of birth
3. Ensuring that newborn infants are not given food or drink other than breast milk unless medically indicated
4. Refraining from the practice of providing infant formula to mothers at hospital discharge

Finally, the study examined Toronto Public Health practices in relation to the BCC's *Seven Point Plan and Practice Outcome Indicators for the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding in Community Health Services* (March 2004) and the Board directed TPH to also achieve BFI designation as soon as possible.

**COMMENTS**

Following the release of the study findings, TPH staff met with each Toronto birthing hospital to discuss how TPH could work collaboratively with them to support breastfeeding and their efforts to achieve BFI.

Currently, Toronto East General Hospital is the only designated Baby-Friendly Hospital in Toronto, while all of the other hospitals have indicated their intention to improve policies and practices that support breastfeeding. A number of them had already taken steps towards achieving Baby-Friendly designation prior to Board report. For others, the breastfeeding study was the impetus to improve breastfeeding policies and practices. Several opportunities for collaboration with Toronto birthing hospitals have arisen over the past year. These have included exploring the development of a breastfeeding support group, expanding breastfeeding clinic services and invitations for TPH staff to participate on hospital BFI committees.

In order to informally assess the progress that hospitals have made over the past year, TPH recently sent out a questionnaire to all of the Toronto birthing hospitals asking them to provide a brief update on their progress toward achieving each of the four priority recommendations. All ten of the Toronto birthing hospitals responded to the questionnaire (note: there are ten birthing hospitals in Toronto with two of the hospitals having two birthing sites each).

The first area of focus relates to the development of written policies. It is evident that significant effort has been made towards implementing policies and practices that support breastfeeding. Seven of the ten hospitals now have a written policy that covers all *Ten
Steps to Successful Breastfeeding including a mechanism to evaluate their policy. One hospital reported having a comprehensive written standard of care while the other two hospitals are currently working on their policy.

Helping mothers to initiate breastfeeding within the first half hour is the second area of focus. Toronto birthing hospitals clearly recognize the importance of babies being placed skin to skin with their mothers after birth in order to facilitate breastfeeding success. Six of the ten hospitals reported that they are actively implementing this practice. The other four hospitals are implementing a variety of education initiatives for both staff and patients on the benefits of skin to skin contact with the goal of increasing early breastfeeding initiation.

With respect to the third area of focus, ensuring that newborns are not given food or drink other than breastmilk unless medically indicated, six out of ten hospitals reported having an explicit policy or Standard of Care on that. Two of the hospitals reported implementing other strategies to reduce unnecessary formula supplementation, such as a breastfeeding decision tree. One hospital is exploring the feasibility of requiring a physician's order for formula supplementation. Six out of ten hospitals are implementing various staff education strategies regarding supplementation with the goal of increasing their exclusive breastfeeding rate on hospital discharge.

The final area of focus is refraining from the practice of providing infant formula to mothers at hospital discharge. Eight out of ten hospitals reported that they do not provide infant formula to mothers at hospital discharge. One of these hospitals reported that in cases where the infant is medically challenged the baby may be sent home with specialized infant formula. Of the remaining two hospitals, one reported that they supply discharged mothers who are supplementing their newborn (by lactation aid or finger feeding) with enough infant formula for 1 to 2 feedings and one reported that they provide formula to mothers who have decided to formula feed to assist them with the first post-discharge feeding.

Despite these excellent gains, compliance with the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (The Code) continues to be the most significant challenge for hospitals in their efforts to achieve BFI designation.

Toronto Public Health is also actively pursuing BFI Designation for Community Health Service settings. Efforts to date have addressed the areas for improvement that were identified in TPH’s self assessment of its breastfeeding policies and practices. This has included:

- education to all staff to increase awareness and understanding of BFI
- review of all TPH resources that reference infants and young children to ensure that they are supportive of breastfeeding and comply with The Code
- development of a comprehensive BFI policy
- development of an Informed Decision Making - Infant Feeding policy and procedure for Healthy Families programs
Despite this excellent progress, TPH faces several unique challenges in achieving BFI designation. Toronto's birth rate of approximately 31,000 births per year makes the required data collection regarding breastfeeding duration rates a very complex task. In addition, the large number of TPH staff presents challenges related to the requirements for staff training. While neither of these challenges is insurmountable, they are both resource and time intensive.

The second challenge is that TPH's ability to achieve BFI designation is directly related to the success of Toronto birthing hospitals in increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge. The 2010 breastfeeding study found that rates of exclusive breastfeeding at hospital discharge varied from 27% to 79.1%. BCC criteria for community health service settings requires that 75% of healthy full term babies are being exclusively breastfed at entry into the community service (for TPH, this coincides with hospital discharge). Significant gains in exclusive breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge will be required before TPH can achieve BFI designation.

Toronto Public Health will continue to partner with Toronto birthing hospitals to support their achievement of BFI designation. We will also continue to aggressively pursue our own designation, while engaging in a comprehensive range of community-based strategies to promote and support breastfeeding. These include delivery of individual breastfeeding support and counseling through telephone, home visiting and community clinics, outreach to specific populations of women who are less likely to breastfeed and promotion of the Breastfeeding-Friendly Campaign to ensure that breastfeeding women feel comfortable and welcome to breastfeed anytime, anywhere.

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REFERENCES
Breastfeeding in Toronto: Promoting Supportive Environments Summary and Technical Reports, March 2010