

Breastfeeding Survey 2021

Background

The Department of Health (DH) has been monitoring the trend of local breastfeeding rates all along. In addition to the collection of monthly reports of ever breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge from all local public and private hospitals with maternity units, reports of exclusive breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge has also been collected from the birthing hospitals since 2017.

In parallel, to monitor the breastfeeding rates during the first year of infants, DH conducts breastfeeding survey regularly at Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), where about 90% of all babies born in Hong Kong could be accessed. It was first conducted annually since 1998, and then biennially from 2002.

Objective

The Breastfeeding Survey 2021 aims to assess breastfeeding rates in the first year of life among babies born in the year of 2020, so as to monitor the local trend.

Methodology

It is a cross-sectional survey through convenience sampling. The sample includes all one-year-old babies brought by their parents or main carers to attend the MCHC within the data collection period. Longitudinal data on the baby's feeding practices at 1 month, 2 months, 4 months and 6 months are transcribed from the child health record, and at 12 months through directly enquiring the parent or the carer. All data are recorded on a standardised data collection sheet by nurses. To facilitate better understanding on baby feeding practices, the age of introduction of complementary foods is also collected. A baby's breastfeeding status is categorised according to the WHO's latest standard.¹

All breastfeeding surveys were conducted in May to July of the year to reduce seasonal variations of the findings and improve comparability. This year, the

¹ Global Nutrition Monitoring Framework. Operational Guidance For Tracking Progress in Meeting Targets for 2025. World Health Organization. Dec 2017.

data collection was conducted at 26 MCHCs from 24 May to 11 June 2021.

Results

Breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge in 2020:

According to the reports from all local hospitals with maternity units², a total of 43 024 babies was born in 2020. The **ever breastfeeding rate (hospital BF rate) and exclusive breastfeeding rate (hospital EBF rate) at hospital discharge** of babies born in 2020 was 86.8% and 18.9% respectively. The hospital BF rates and EBF rates of babies born in 2020 were compared to those of babies born in 2016 and 2018. (See table 1)

Findings from Breastfeeding Survey 2021:

A total of 2 137 babies who were born in 2020 attended the routine 12-month MCHC immunisation visit within the data collection period. Among them, 1 755 babies completed the Survey.³ The response rate was 82.1%.

The **breastfeeding rates (BF rates)** of babies born in 2020 at 1, 2, 4, 6 and 12 months were 77.4%, 66.6%, 53.9%, 43.1% and 23.9% respectively. Whereas, the **exclusive breastfeeding rates (EBF rates)** of babies born in 2020 at 1, 2, 4 and 6 months were 28.8%, 28.1%, 25.6% and 22.2% respectively.

WHO recommended that babies should be breastfed exclusively in the first 6 months. At around 6 months of age, complementary food should be introduced in their diet, with continued breastfeeding to 2 years old or above. Majority of the surveyed babies with exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months (i.e. fed with breastmilk without using any formula milk) had started complementary food.

The BF rates and EBF rates of babies born in 2020 were compared to those of babies born in 2016 and 2018. (See table 2)

Family Health Service,
Department of Health
Nov 2021

² Data were collected from 19 hospitals with maternity units in Hong Kong, including 8 public hospitals under the Hospital Authority and 11 private hospitals.

³ Those babies whose feeding information could not be obtained from the mother and carer nor the clinical records were not included in the BF Survey.

Table 1: Breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge of babies born in 2016, 2018 and 2020.

	Year of birth		
	2016	2018	2020
Number of live births	60 853	53 711	43 024
Ever breastfeeding rate at hospital discharge	86.8%	87.5%	86.8%
Exclusive breastfeeding rate at hospital discharge*	-	21.0%	18.9%

*Exclusive breastfeeding rate at hospital discharge are collected from the public and private birthing hospitals from 2017 onwards.

Table 2: Breastfeeding rates of babies born in 2016, 2018 and 2020.

Breastfeeding Surveys		2016	2018	2020
		N=2614 (95%CI)	N=2218 (95%CI)	N=1755 (95%CI)
Breastfeeding rate^a	At 1 month	78.2% (76.6-79.8%)	76.6% (74.8-78.4%)	77.4% (75.3-79.3%)
	At 2 month	67.0% (65.2-68.8%)	66.4% (64.4-68.4%)	66.6% (64.3-68.8%)
	At 4 month	55.5% (53.6-57.4%)	55.7% (53.6-57.7%)	53.9% (51.5-56.3%)
	At 6 month	47.0% (45.1-48.9%)	46.5% (44.4-48.6%)	43.1% (40.7-45.4%)
	At 12 month	28.2% (26.5-29.9%)	26.1% (24.3-27.9%)	23.9% (21.9-25.9%)
Exclusive breastfeeding rate^b	At 1 month	33.8% (32-35.6%)	32.6% (30.6-34.5%)	28.8% (26.7-31.0%)
	At 2 month	33.4% (31.6-35.2%)	31.5% (29.6-33.4%)	28.1% (26.0-30.3%)
	At 4 month	30.7% (28.9-32.4%)	29.1% (27.2-31.0%)	25.6% (23.6-27.8%)
	At 6 month ^c	27.9% (26.2-29.7%)	26.3% (24.5-28.1%)	22.2% (20.2-24.2%)

Note:

^a Breastfeeding (BF) rate refers to any form of breastfeeding, including babies exclusively breastfed as well as those breastfed supplemented by formula milk or solid food.

^b Exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) rate means the baby is feeding on breastmilk only (either directly from breast or indirectly from expressed breastmilk).

^c Exclusive breastfeeding rate at 6 months means the baby is feeding on breastmilk without using any formula milk, and they may or may not have started complementary food.