

Breastfeeding Survey 2017

Background

The Department of Health (DH) all along monitors the trend of local breastfeeding rates. Apart from collecting monthly reports of ever breastfeeding rate from hospitals with maternity units, Breastfeeding Survey is conducted regularly in its Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHC), which cover about 90% of all infants born in Hong Kong. The breastfeeding survey was first conducted annually since 1998, and then biannually from 2002 onwards.

Objective

The breastfeeding survey aims to assess breastfeeding rates in the first year of life among babies born in the year of 2016, so as to monitor the local trend.

Methodology

It is a cross-sectional survey including all one-year-old children brought by their parents or main carers to attend the MCHC within the data collection period. The feeding practices at 1 month, 2 months, 4 months and 6 months of the child 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 infant feeding practices, the age of introduction of complementary foods is also collected. An infant'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.

Results

During the data collection period from 8 May to 26 May 2017, 3,445 infants who were born in 2016 attended the routine 12-month MCHC immunisation visit. Among them, 2,614 infants completed the Survey. The response rate was 75.9%.²

According to the reports from hospitals with maternity units, the ever breastfeeding rates of children born in 2016 on hospital discharge was 86.8%.

¹ Indicators for assessing infant and young child feeding practices – part III: country profiles. World Health Organization. 2010.

² Children whose feeding information could not be obtained from the mother and carer nor the clinical records were not included in the BF Survey.

The breastfeeding rates of infants born in 2012, 2014 and 2016 are shown in table 1.

The present breastfeeding survey revealed that the breastfeeding rates (BF rates) and exclusive breastfeeding rates (EBF rates) among infants born in 2016 showed an increase over those born in 2014 and 2012. The BF rates of infants born in 2016 at 1, 2, 4, 6 and 12 months were 78%, 67%, 56%, 47%, and 28% respectively. Whereas, the EBF rates of infants born in 2016 at 1, 2 and 4 months were 34%, 33% and 31% 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. Results of the Breastfeeding Survey 2017 revealed that the median age of introduction of complementary food to infants was 6 months 0 week. Regarding the feeding practice at 6 months of age, 27.9% of infants were fed with breastmilk without using any formula milk. Of this, about 27% of surveyed infants continued to be fed with breastmilk while taking complementary food at 6 months of age, whereas 0.9 % of the infants had not started complementary feeding at 6 months and was fed with breastmilk only.

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Table 1: Breastfeeding rates of infants born in 2012, 2014 and 2016.

		Year of birth		
		2012	2014	2016
Ever breastfeeding rate at hospital discharge		85.0% (N=91,546)	86.4% (N=62,295)	86.8% (N=60,853)
Breastfeeding Surveys		2012 N=2,016 (95% CI)	2014 N=1,615 (95%CI)	2016 N=2,614 (95%CI)
Breastfeeding rate^a	At 1 month of age	68.6% (66.6-70.6%)	73.1% (70.9-75.3%)	78.2% (76.6-79.8%)
	At 2 month of age	55.5% (53.5-57.7%)	61.0% (58.6-63.4%)	67.0% (65.2-68.8%)
	At 4 month of age	44.3% (42.1-46.5%)	50.3% (47.8-52.7%)	55.5% (53.6-57.4%)
	At 6 month of age	32.7% (30.7-34.8%)	40.9% (38.5-43.4%)	47.0% (45.1-48.9%)
	At 12 month of age	14.2% (12.7-15.7%)	25.1% (23-27.3%)	28.2% (26.5-29.9%)
Exclusive breastfeeding rate^b	At 1 month of age	22.1% (20.3-23.9%)	30.8% (28.5-33.1%)	33.8% (32-35.6%)
	At 2 month of age	21.7% (19.9-23.5%)	30.4% (28.2-32.7%)	33.4% (31.6-35.2%)
	At 4 month of age	19.1% (17.4-20.8%)	26.6% (24.5-28.9%)	30.7% (28.9-32.4%)
	At 6 month of age [#]	2.3% - babies exclusively fed with breast milk [#] (1.7-3.0%)	25.5% (23.4-27.7%) [24.3% - babies fed with breast milk and solid food] [1.2% - babies exclusively fed with breast milk]	27.9% (26.2-29.7%) [27.0% - babies fed with breast milk and solid food] [0.9% - babies exclusively fed with breast milk]

Note:

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

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

[#] In the Breastfeeding Survey 2015 & 2017, information on complementary food at 6 months was collected to facilitate better understanding of the infant feeding practice. The EBF rates at 6 months might not be directly comparable to previous surveys.