

## **Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Breastfeeding Support: Stay Connected!**

*August is National Breastfeeding Awareness Month*

“Human milk is the preferred feeding for all infants, including premature and sick newborns. It is recommended that breastfeeding continue for at least the first 12 months, and thereafter for as long as mutually desired” (American Academy of Pediatrics). Breastfeeding is so important for mothers and babies that major medical organizations such as the American Association of Family Physicians recommend that babies receive nothing but breast milk during the first six months of life, and continue receiving breast milk for at least the first year and beyond. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency agrees and is promoting National Breastfeeding Awareness Month, with the theme, “Breastfeeding Support: Stay Connected!” during the month of August.

While 58.4% percent of Michigan mothers planned to breastfeed at the start, only 34.2% percent of babies are still breastfeeding at six months according to the most recent Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) data. Within the Tri-counties, the average percentage of breastfeeding mothers is only slightly lower than the state at 33.9%. Given that breastfeeding provides significant health benefits for both mother and baby, it is important that family members, clinicians, friends, and employers know how they can help make breastfeeding easier.

Breastfeeding has been shown to provide many health benefits, both to nursing mothers and to their children. Scientific studies have shown that mothers' milk helps reduce risks for many childhood diseases, including sudden infant death syndrome, childhood leukemia, ear infections, asthma and type 2 diabetes. Breastfed babies are also less likely to develop childhood obesity. According to Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Director for the tri-county health department "Breastfeeding is the most natural, healthy, and loving gift a mother can give to her baby. Mother's milk has everything a baby needs to grow and stay healthy. By breastfeeding your child, he/she will enjoy many short and long term health benefits." Studies have also shown that women who have nursed are at lower risk for developing type 2 diabetes, breast cancer and ovarian cancer.

Breastfeeding not only helps keep moms and children healthy, it also helps families save money through reduced medical costs, lost time at work and costs for formula and feeding supplies, which can total over \$1,500 each year. Many moms say their efforts to breastfeed are enhanced by several other factors too, such as having received breastfeeding instruction or education from healthcare providers, as well as support at home and in the workplace.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency encourages women to consider breastfeeding their infants and offers support. Through its WIC program, moms who choose to breastfeed receive support from a trained, peer counselor. They may also receive: educational materials, and an expanded supplemental food package which includes milk, cheese, Vitamin C fortified juices, iron enriched cereals, dry beans and peas or peanut butter, whole grain breads or tortillas, fruits, vegetables and tuna fish. Eligible moms may also receive breast pump equipment. Please contact the local health department office to learn more about the WIC program and its eligibility requirements. Or check out our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org).

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