

Exclusive breastfeeding in hospital associated with longer breastfeeding duration

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New findings from AllerGen's CHILD Study show that exclusive breastfeeding during the first few days of life is positively associated with longer-term breastfeeding, while in-hospital formula use is associated with breastfeeding for a significantly shorter duration.

Dr. Meghan Azad, an investigator with AllerGen and the Children's Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba, and an epidemiologist at the University of Manitoba, led a research team that found that breastfeeding ended earlier for infants who received formula supplementation in hospital, compared to those who received only breast milk during this critical period. The findings were published this week in the journal [*Birth*](#).

"Newborns who received only breast milk were ultimately breastfed for four months longer than those who received formula supplementation in hospital, and they were 63% more likely to meet the World Health Organization recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding for six months," says Dr. Azad.

"This is important, because we know that breastfeeding has many established health benefits, including protection from asthma and obesity in breastfed children, and a reduced risk of diabetes in mothers who breastfeed."

The researchers used data from more than 3,100 infants and their mothers participating in the CHILD Study—a Canadian birth cohort study that is tracking children from before birth to school age and beyond to identify the root causes of asthma, allergy and other chronic conditions.

Newborn feeding was documented from hospital records, and families enrolled in the CHILD study provided information about their babies' breastfeeding status and diet at three, six, 12, 18 and 24 months of age. Overall, 97% of newborns were breastfed initially. Of these, 74% were exclusively breastfed during their hospital stay, while 26% received supplementation with formula. The exclusively breastfed newborns were ultimately breastfed for 11 months on average, compared to 7 months for those receiving formula supplementation.

The researchers also discovered something not previously reported in other breastfeeding research, according to Lorena Vehling, an AllerGen trainee and first author of the study. "We found that that among women with a lower education level, exclusive breastfeeding in hospital was particularly beneficial for extending breastfeeding duration," she says. "The beneficial effect was twice as great among mothers with lower education."

"Our results suggest that programs supporting new mothers to exclusively breastfeed in hospital will facilitate sustained breastfeeding within and beyond the first year of life, and this will support a plethora of associated health benefits for these women and their children."

“This excellent research addresses the impact of breastfeeding on the social determinants of health,” comments Maria Mackay, a Registered Nurse and lactation consultant. “This new finding reinforces the importance of breastfeeding in reducing health inequities across the lifespan, and it will help inform the practices of health professionals like me as we work with the parents of newborns.”

“This study validates the importance of uninterrupted early exclusive breastfeeding to get breastfeeding established for the long haul,” adds lactation consultant Marusia Kachkowski. “It reaffirms that medically unnecessary supplements are worth avoiding whenever possible, to establish supply and demand and to bolster a mother’s confidence in her ability to nourish her child.”

About the CHILD Study: Launched in 2008 by CIHR and AllerGen NCE, the [CHILD Study](#) is tracking thousands of Canadian families and their infants over early childhood to help determine the root causes of chronic diseases, such as asthma, allergies and obesity, among other conditions. With its National Coordinating Centre based at St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton, the CHILD Study relies upon the world-recognized expertise in birth cohorts, and in allergy and asthma treatment, care and training, of McMaster University and its Faculty of Health Sciences, together with their affiliated teaching hospitals, Hamilton Health Sciences and St. Joseph’s Healthcare. The CHILD Study spans four provinces, involving over 140 multidisciplinary researchers, students and research staff. [Watch the CHILD Study videos.](#)

About the Children’s Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba: The Children’s Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba was established in 2001. [CHRIM](#) is the research division of the Children’s Hospital Foundation of Manitoba. At the Institute, more than 270 world-class pediatric medical researchers, technical staff, students and support staff are involved in over \$10 million of research and clinical trial activity each year.

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Media Contacts:

Ilana Simon
Rady Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Manitoba
Tel: (204) 789-3427
Email: ilana.simon@umanitoba

Rebecca Rallo
Children’s Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba
Tel: (204) 272-3135
Email: rrallo@chrime.ca

Kim Wright
AllerGen NCE Inc.
Tel: (905) 525-9140 ext. 26641
Email: kimwright@allergen-nce.ca