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### **Study shows written hospital policies encourage breastfeeding**

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A study led by an Oregon physician found that a woman is much more likely to breastfeed her infant if she gives birth in a hospital that has a written policy that supports breastfeeding.

The study, headed by Dr. Kenneth D. Rosenberg, M.D., of the Oregon Department of Human Services State Public Health Division, found that hospitals with written, comprehensive breast-feeding policies are more likely to have staff members who encourage breastfeeding at birth. That, in turn, leads to an increase in the numbers of new mothers who breastfeed their infants.

The study appears in the last issue of the journal *Breastfeeding Medicine*.

Rosenberg, a physician in the Health Division's Office of Family Health, said the objective of the study was to examine the link between the World Health Organization's Ten Steps of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and the extent to which mothers breastfeed their children.

The Ten Steps include having the mother and baby sleep in the same room, feeding the baby when she or he is hungry (not on a fixed schedule) and using breastfeeding exclusively with no supplementary feedings. Many of these steps have been previously shown to increase breastfeeding.

Success of a hospital's breastfeeding program was measured using a questionnaire administered in all 57 birthing hospitals in Oregon. Hospital breastfeeding outcomes were obtained from forms that record the results of newborn metabolic screening. The form includes information not only about the metabolic tests but also about all of the sources of food received by the infant in the 24 hours before the screening.

Rosenberg said breastfeeding contributes to the health of both mothers and babies. He said studies show that breastfed infants have lower rates of ear infections, diarrhea, pneumonia and asthma -- and the benefits are greatest when babies are breastfed exclusively. Breastfeeding mothers have a lower risk of postpartum depression, ovarian and breast cancer, and more quickly return to pre-pregnancy weight.

In addition to the effects on physical health, breastfeeding improves the emotional bond between mothers and infants. The bonding element is particularly important for young, first-time mothers, he said, because it makes them more likely to become successful parents.

Hospitals in the study ranged widely in size and the number of deliveries. But having a written policy on breastfeeding was the key determining factor in hospitals' successful promotion of breastfeeding, Rosenberg said.

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