



STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Corning Tower The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza Albany, New York 12237

Richard F. Daines, M.D.
Commissioner

James W. Clyne, Jr.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

September 2009

A Call to Action to Increase Breastfeeding in New York State

Dear Colleagues:

I call on all healthcare providers to join the New York State Department of Health (Department) and the New York Statewide Breastfeeding Coalition, Greater New York Hospital Association, Healthcare Association of New York State, New York State WIC Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Medical Society of the State of New York, Association of Perinatal Networks of New York, Inc. and other stakeholders to promote and support breastfeeding by enhancing awareness, reducing barriers and improving knowledge and skills to increase initiation, duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding.

The benefits of breastfeeding are well established. Breastfeeding promotes overall health, growth and development and helps prevent infections during infancy, as well as asthma, obesity, diabetes and other chronic diseases in childhood and later in life. Breastfeeding also benefits the mother, reducing postpartum bleeding and reducing the risk of breast and ovarian cancers and yields economic benefits to the family and society.

Breastfeeding (exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding during the second six months) is the recommended feeding method for optimal infant growth and development. In New York State, most new mothers (70 to 80 percent) initiate breastfeeding. With optimal hospital policies, practices and support, most women can exclusively breastfeed throughout their hospital stay and with family, community and health care professional support, many women can exclusively breastfeed for the first six months postpartum. Current rates of exclusive breastfeeding in New York are approximately half of the *Healthy People 2010* goals: 26 percent vs. 40 percent, respectively, at three months and 8 percent vs. 17 percent, respectively, at six months.

The Department is collaborating with the Regional Perinatal Centers and affiliated hospitals to improve their exclusive breastfeeding rates. To facilitate these improvements, information about infant feeding practices and breastfeeding rates at individual hospitals will be posted to the Department's Web site and included in the *Maternity Information Leaflets*.

I call on all New York State healthcare providers to:

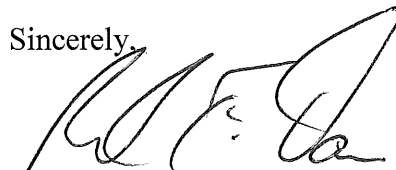
- Increase their knowledge and skills to encourage and support breastfeeding among new mothers by participating in a continuing education program such as that developed and provided through the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

- Work with hospitals with which you are affiliated to ensure that their policies and practices are consistent with New York State's Perinatal Network regulations and that best practices associated with breastfeeding are implemented.
- Discuss with prenatal patients and new mothers the benefits of breastfeeding, emphasizing exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, to give their babies the best start and protect their infants from infectious diseases, including influenza.
- Provide or refer women considering or actively breastfeeding to structured breastfeeding education and counseling programs as recommended by the United States Preventive Services Task Force. Income-eligible women can be referred to New York State's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). All local WIC programs have certified lactation counselors and breastfeeding peer counselors to provide breastfeeding education and lactation support. The WIC Program now provides a more comprehensive and valuable food package to lactating women and their infants six months of age and older.
- Limit the provision of infant formula and promotional materials produced by formula companies.
- Inform pregnant women, new mothers and their families of women's right to express milk at work and that employers must provide reasonable unpaid break time or permit an employee to use paid break time or meal time each day to express milk for her nursing child for up to three years, in accordance with Section 206-c of New York State Labor Law.

I look forward to collaborating with you to ensure that your clinical offices', hospitals' and worksites' practices and environments optimally support new mothers in successfully breastfeeding their infants. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the Department at: promotebreastfeeding@health.state.ny.us.

I appreciate your work to improve the health of New York's babies and their mothers.

Sincerely,



Richard F. Daines, M.D.
Commissioner of Health