

Breastfeeding

DEFINITION

Breastfeeding is the number and percentage of newborn infants who are breastfed at the time of hospital discharge.

SIGNIFICANCE

Breastfeeding is widely recognized as the ideal method of feeding and nurturing infants and is a critical component in achieving optimal infant and child health, growth, and development.^{1,2} National health experts recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months after birth and continuous breastfeeding for at least 12 months after birth or longer as mutually desired by mother and child.³

Breastfeeding decreases infant mortality and morbidity. Infant benefits include optimal nutrition, stronger immune systems, and reduced risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and chronic conditions such as asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes, and ear infections. Breastfeeding benefits mothers by creating a strong bond with infants and decreasing risk for postpartum depression, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. Breastfeeding provides significant social and economic benefits, including reduced cost to the family, reduced health care costs, and reduced employee absenteeism.^{4,5,6}

Breastfeeding can be effectively promoted by hospital and other birth

facility policies and practices that take place before, during, and after labor and delivery, including access to professional lactation consultants and involvement in community breastfeeding support networks.⁷ In 2015, Women & Infants Hospital became the second-largest hospital in the U.S. to achieve the “Baby-Friendly” designation, which recognizes breastfeeding support and promotion by birth facilities.⁸ There are now four Baby-Friendly hospitals in Rhode Island: Kent Hospital, Newport Hospital, South County Hospital, and Women & Infants Hospital.⁹

Breastfeeding rates generally increase with higher educational attainment and higher income levels.¹⁰ Healthy People 2030 sets target breastfeeding rates of 42% of infants breastfed exclusively through 6 months and 54% of infants breastfed at any extent at one year of age.¹¹

Breastfeeding Rates		
	6 months [^]	12 months
RI	23%	33%
US	25%	36%
National Rank*	39 th	37 th
New England Rank**	6 th	6 th

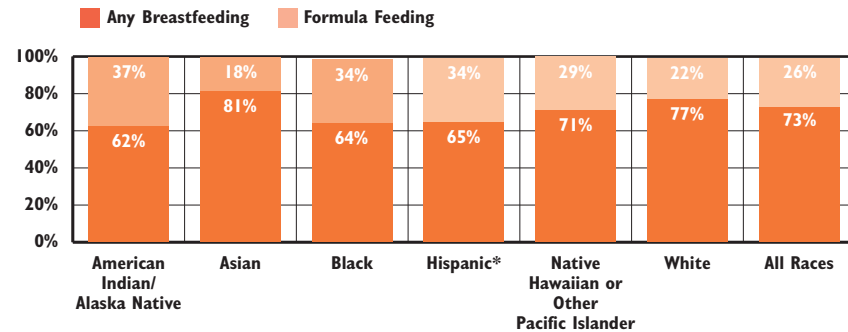
^{*}1st is best; 50th is worst

^{**}1st is best; 6th is worst

[^]exclusively breastfed

Source: Centers for Disease Control, *National Immunization Surveys* (NIS), 2020 and 2021.
Note: Data is from 2019.

Breastfeeding and Formula Feeding at Birth by Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2017-2021*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, KIDSNET, 2017-2021.

Breastfeeding and formula feeding are defined as intended feeding method at hospital discharge.* Hispanic infants can be of any race. Totals may not sum to 100% because data on feeding methods were not available for all births.

◆ Between 2017 and 2021, 73% of new mothers in Rhode Island indicated that they intended to breastfeed when discharged from the hospital and 26% intended to formula feed.¹² American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic infants are less likely to be breastfed than white and Asian infants, due to structural, interpersonal, cultural, and historical barriers that Women of Color face. Structural barriers include lack of support and discrimination from the health care and workplace settings, including limited paid family leave. Interpersonal barriers include lack of family support and inadequate workplace policies for breastfeeding moms.^{13,14}

Paid Family Leave and Breastfeeding

◆ Paid family leave provides compensation to workers, including parents of a new child. Rhode Island established a paid family leave program in 2013, but has since fallen behind the 11 other states with programs. Rhode Island currently offers the lowest wage replacement rate and only six weeks of leave, the fewest of any state.¹⁵

◆ Access to 12 weeks of paid family leave increases the initiation and overall duration of breastfeeding and the likelihood of breastfeeding for at least six months.¹⁶ Improving the state’s paid family leave program to meet national standards would help ensure equitable access to paid leave and breastfeeding support, especially for Women of Color.^{17,18}

Table 21. Breastfeeding at Time of Birth, Rhode Island, 2017-2021

CITY/TOWN	NUMBER OF BIRTHS SCREENED	NUMBER ANY BREASTFEEDING	PERCENT WITH ANY BREASTFEEDING
Barrington	543	489	90%
Bristol	619	497	80%
Burrillville	589	446	76%
Central Falls	1,517	914	60%
Charlestown	246	209	85%
Coventry	1,438	1,122	78%
Cranston	3,769	2,786	74%
Cumberland	1,545	1,232	80%
East Greenwich	596	523	88%
East Providence	2,158	1,582	73%
Exeter	234	200	85%
Foster	205	171	83%
Glocester	297	235	79%
Hopkinton	264	211	80%
Jamestown	131	124	95%
Johnston	1,311	942	72%
Lincoln	860	686	80%
Little Compton	48	38	79%
Middletown	757	643	85%
Narragansett	238	212	89%
New Shoreham	27	24	89%
Newport	1,041	839	81%
North Kingstown	1,097	958	87%
North Providence	1,546	1,091	71%
North Smithfield	408	344	84%
Pawtucket	4,143	2,738	66%
Portsmouth	583	513	88%
Providence	11,572	7,373	64%
Richmond	324	282	87%
Scituate	436	363	83%
Smithfield	693	557	80%
South Kingstown	811	722	89%
Tiverton	359	282	79%
Warren	377	276	73%
Warwick	3,513	2,705	77%
West Greenwich	244	207	85%
West Warwick	1,478	1,059	72%
Westerly	711	628	88%
Woonsocket	2,400	1,516	63%
Four Core Cities	19,632	12,541	64%
Remainder of State	29,496	23,198	79%
Rhode Island	49,128	35,739	73%



Rhode Island Supports for Breastfeeding

◆ All 50 states have passed legislation that provides mothers with the explicit right to breastfeed in all public or private places.¹⁹ Since 2015, Rhode Island law has prohibited job discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions and required employers to make reasonable accommodations for workers for conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth, including breastfeeding.²⁰ Other barriers to supporting breastfeeding include accessibility and accommodations for lactation in the workplace and community.²¹

◆ In 2014, Rhode Island became the first state in the U.S. to establish licensure for International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs). State-certified and trained lactation consultants provide comprehensive lactation support and counseling for pregnant and postpartum women. In January 2023, Rhode Island had 70 licensed IBCLCs.^{22,23}

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, Maternal and Child Health Database, 2017-2021.

Breastfeeding is defined as “breastfeeding as intended feeding method at hospital discharge.” “Percent With Any Breastfeeding” includes infants fed breast milk in combination with formula and those exclusively breastfed.

*Note: The data collection process at the Rhode Island Department of Health was changed in 2015. Prior to 2015, breastfeeding was recorded as “Breast,” “Bottle,” or “Both.” Since 2015, a “Yes” or “No” question on the birth certificate worksheet “Is the infant being breastfed at discharge?” has been used. Data from and prior to 2015 for “Exclusive breastfeeding” and “Both breast and formula” have been combined into the “Any breastfeeding” category to align with current data collection practices.

The number of births screened may differ from the total number of births reported elsewhere in the Factbook as not all documented births received a screening. Births to Rhode Island women that occurred outside Rhode Island are not included.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References

- ¹³ Meek J.Y., Noble, L. (2022). Policy statement: Breastfeeding and the use of human milk. *Pediatrics*, 150(1), e2022057988.
- ^{22,23} *Breastfeeding: 2015-2020 Rhode Island strategic plan*. (2015). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Health.
- ⁴ *The benefits of breastfeeding for you and baby*. (2022). Cleveland, OH: The Cleveland Clinic.
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from cdc.gov
- ⁶ Hauck, K., Miraldo, M., & Singh, S. (2020). Integrating motherhood and employment: A 22-year analysis investigating impacts of US workplace breastfeeding policy. *SSM – Population Health*, 11, 1-10.

(continued on page 182)