

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hats Off to Breastfeeding!

Coldwater, MI. Affordable health care begins with breastfeeding. A recent study published in *Pediatrics*, the Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics (January, 2010) found that if 90% babies were EXCLUSIVELY breastfed (no formula) for the first six months of life, the U.S. could save \$13 billion in health care costs each year. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency recognizes the benefits of breastfeeding and understands its importance as a public health issue. We encourage all new mothers to breastfeed their infants.

Governor Rick Snyder has declared August as Breastfeeding Awareness Month. He recognizes the role that breastfeeding plays in reducing infant mortality and childhood obesity. This year's theme, "***The Road to Lifelong Health Begins with Breastfeeding***" reminds us that the choice a mother makes in feeding her newborn has lasting consequences for both herself and her baby. Research shows that breast milk protects infants from disease (less ear infections, eczema, diarrhea, respiratory infections and sudden infant death syndrome). It also lowers the risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes and certain childhood cancers. Mothers, who breastfeed, are also more likely to have lower rates of breast and ovarian cancer. Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Director for the tri-county health department, states "I believe we all want every child that is born to start out and remain on the road to lifelong good health. We can build this road - for ourselves and our children by laying a good foundation. Breastfeeding is that foundation."

While the evidence for human milk feeding is clear, many infants are not receiving breast milk as recommended. Rates for initiating breastfeeding or continuing breastfeeding among Michigan mothers are below the national average. While it is legal to breastfeed in

public in all 50 States, Michigan is one of only five States that does not offer statutory protection for breastfeeding mothers. Mothers often express concerns about breastfeeding in public.

During the month of August, communities across Michigan will host events to bring attention to the crucial role breastfeeding plays in the health and well-being of mothers and children. The tri-county health department's WIC program is joining these efforts. It has set a goal: **100% of expectant mothers enrolled in the local WIC program will promise to provide at least one breast milk feeding for their new baby.** In order to accomplish this goal, the health department will be sponsoring events like the **Hats Off to Breastfeeding Campaign.**

The **Hats Off to Breastfeeding Campaign** kicks off in August at the tri-county local health department offices. Through this campaign, all breastfeeding mothers and their children are invited to participate in a fun, free "photo session" with the latest fashion hit for breastfeeding babes - Nursing Hat Covers. (Nursing hat covers are a really cute way to cover up in public). Local WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselors will be on hand to take your photo and answer questions about WIC and how it can help you and your family in making and maintaining the breastfeeding choice for your infant. Participants can also register to win a Nursing Hat cover. To learn more about the **Hats Off to Breastfeeding Campaign** and to schedule your free photo session, please call the local office of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency at:

Branch County Office – 517-279-9561, ext. 147

Hillsdale Office – 517-437-7395, ext. 117

St. Joseph County Office – 269-273-2161, ext. 206

WIC is a supplemental food and nutrition program that is offered free of charge to eligible participants. Breastfeeding moms who participate in WIC receive support regularly 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 listed above to learn more about the WIC program and its eligibility requirements. Or check out our website at www.bhsj.org.

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