

BREASTFEEDING FAST FACTS!

Differences in Breastfeeding Practices, Awareness & Attitudes in Middlesex-London

WHAT WAS DONE?

Monitoring local population-level change in breastfeeding practices, attitudes towards breastfeeding in public places, and awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding is important. This *Fast Facts* provides an update on the report, *The Health Index: Breastfeeding Practices, Awareness & Attitudes in Middlesex London, Issue 13*.¹

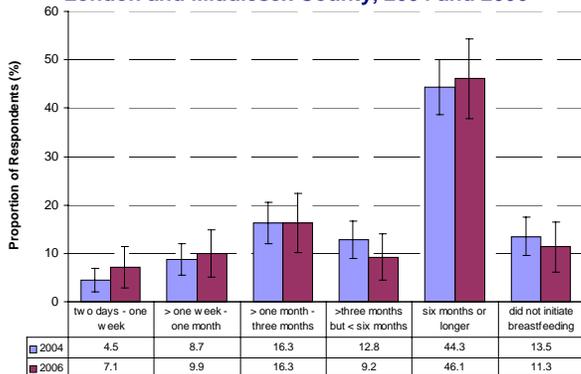
The data presented in this *Fast Facts* are from the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) and the Parent Survey. These surveys were collected for the Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) by the Institute of Social Research, York University. Both surveys were used in Middlesex-London to monitor:

- i) breastfeeding initiation and duration,
- ii) parental attitudes towards breastfeeding in public places, and
- iii) parental awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding.

All proportions were provided with 95% confidence intervals. Bar charts include error bars illustrating 95% confidence intervals. The results reported in this report differ slightly from the results of the *Health Index*¹ due to minor inconsistencies in adjustments for missing data.



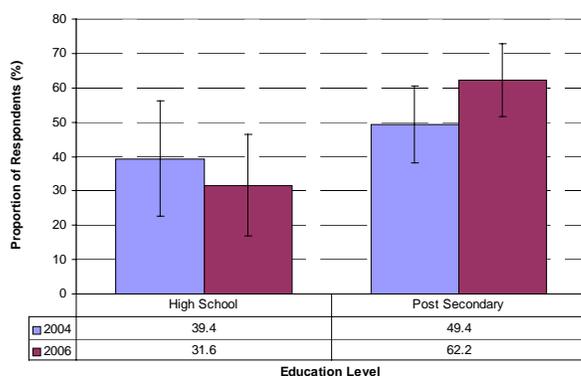
Figure 1: Overall breastfeeding practices for women (ages 18-49) who had a child in the last 5 years* London and Middlesex County, 2004 and 2006



WHAT WAS FOUND?

- **Approximately nine out of ten mothers residing in Middlesex-London initiate breastfeeding.** The Middlesex-London breastfeeding initiation rate in 2004 was 86.5% ($\pm 4.2\%$), while in 2006 the rate was 88.7% ($\pm 5.6\%$). There was no statistically significant change between 2004 and 2006.
- **Only 44.3% ($\pm 5.7\%$) of mothers reported breastfeeding for at least 6 months or longer** in 2004. There was a slight increase in the proportion of women who reported breastfeeding for at least 6 months or longer by 2006 (46.1% $\pm 8.2\%$), but this was not a statistically significant increase. (See Figure 1). The Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines² objective to increase to 50% the proportion of infants breastfed up to 6 months by the year 2010 has not yet been achieved.
- Of the women who initiated breastfeeding and continued to breastfeed for six months or more, **women with a high school education were less likely to continue breastfeeding for six months or longer** as compared to women with post secondary education (2006 data: 31.6% $\pm 14.8\%$ vs. 62.2% $\pm 10.5\%$). There were no statistically significant differences in education from the 2004 data. See Figure 2.
- Of the women who initiated breastfeeding and continued to breastfeed for six months or more, **women 25-34 years of age were less likely to continue breastfeeding for six months or longer** as compared to women 35-44 years of age (2004 data: 37.0 $\pm 8.1\%$ vs. 70.2% $\pm 8.8\%$, respectively). In 2006, of the women who initiated breastfeeding, women ages 25-34 were slightly less likely to continue breastfeeding for six months or longer as compared to women ages 35-44, but this difference was not statistically significant (2006 data: 48.5% $\pm 12.1\%$ vs. 59.6% $\pm 14.0\%$, respectively).
- After the "Other" category (2006 data: 20.7% $\pm 7.2\%$), the most common reasons for discontinuing breastfeeding in 2006, were that the child weaned him or herself (2006 data: 18.2% $\pm 6.9\%$), followed by a perceived insufficient milk supply (2006 data: 15.7% $\pm 6.5\%$), and the mother's milk dried up and/or stopped producing milk (2006 data: 12.4% $\pm 5.9\%$).

Figure 2: Proportion of Women (ages 18-49) who breastfed for six months or longer by education level* London and Middlesex County, 2004 and 2006



Survey Sample:

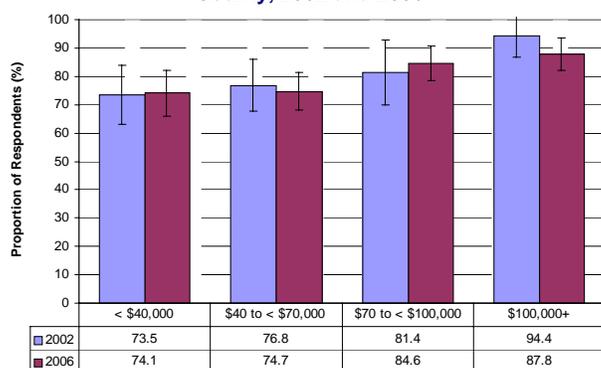
Questions were only asked of women age 18-49 who have given birth in the last 5 years. Women who reported 'currently breastfeeding' were not included in the calculation of the breastfeeding initiation rates.

Data Collection Periods & Sample Size:

Parent Survey 2004: March 4, 2004 to December 5, 2004; Sample Size: n=289
 Parent Survey 2006: April 6, 2006 to July 4, 2006; Sample Size: n=141

Sources: Parent Survey-2004, Parent Survey-2006
 * due to the small sample of respondents without a high school education, estimates for this group were not considered stable, and therefore have not been reported.

**Figure 3: Middlesex-London acceptance of breastfeeding in restaurants by income level
Parents/Caregivers (ages 18+), London and Middlesex County, 2002 and 2006**



Source: RRFSS 2002, Parent Survey-2006



All photos courtesy of Middlesex-London Health Unit

AUTHOR:
Melissa McCann

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND THE FULL DATA TABLES, CONTACT:
Melissa McCann, BA, MSW
Program Evaluator
Research, Education, Evaluation & Development
(REED) Services
Middlesex-London Health Unit
50 King Street,
London, ON N6A 5L7
Tel: 519-663-5317 ext. 2554
Fax: 519-432-9430
Email: melissa.mccann@mlhu.on.ca

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- Middlesex-London Health Unit. (2005, January). *The Health Index: Breastfeeding Practices, Awareness & Attitudes in Middlesex London, Issue 13*. Available online at: www.healthunit.com, Author: Krista Bray Jenkyn.
- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (1997). *Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Parental Attitudes Towards Mothers Breastfeeding In Public Places

- In both 2002 and 2006, approximately three-quarters of Middlesex-London parents/caregivers felt it was acceptable for mothers to breastfeed their babies in restaurants (78.9% ±4.9% in 2002; 79.0% ±3.3% in 2006) and shopping malls (78.5% ±4.9% in 2002; 83.1% ±3.0% in 2006).
- In both 2002 and 2006, **parents/caregivers in two lower household income groups were less likely to think it was acceptable for a mother to breastfeed her baby in a restaurant** [i.e. those with household income levels of less than \$40,000 (73.5% ±10.5% in 2002; 74.1% ±8.0% in 2006) and those between \$40,000 to >\$70,000 (76.8% ±9.1% in 2002; 74.7% ±6.7%)] compared to parents/caregivers with household incomes of \$100,000 and greater (94.4% ±7.5 in 2002; 87.8% ±5.6% in 2006). See Figure 3.

Survey Sample:

- Parents/Caregivers (18+) of children 11 years and under in RRFSS Survey-2002.
- Parents/Caregivers (18+) of children 11 years and under in Parent Survey-2006.

Data Collection Periods & Sample Size:

- RRFSS-2002: January to December 2002 (waves 13 to 24); Sample Size: n=265
- Parent Survey-2006: April 6, 2006 to July 4, 2006; Sample Size: n=599

Parental Awareness of the Benefits of Breastfeeding

- A lower proportion of parents/caregivers in 2006 agreed that a baby who is only breastfed for the first six months of life receive all the nutrition they require for healthy growth compared to parents/caregivers in 2004 (75.5% ±3.6% in 2006 vs. 85.6% ±2.3% in 2004). (Note: the questions asked in 2004 and 2006 were similar, but not identical).
- In 2006, **parents/caregivers who had completed high school were less likely to believe that a baby who is only breastfed for the first 6 months of life get all the food they need for growth** compared to those with post secondary education (65.3% ±7.8% vs. 79.9% ±4.0%, respectively).
- In 2006, **parents/caregivers who have completed high school were less likely to report that breastfeeding helps to keep babies from getting sick** in comparison to parents/caregivers who were post secondary graduates (83.1% ±5.9% vs. 92.1% ±2.7%, respectively).
- A lower proportion of parents/caregivers in 2006 agreed that breastfeeding is good for the mother's health compared to parents/caregivers in 2004 (86.0% ±2.8% in 2006 vs. 91.3% ±1.8% in 2004).

Survey Sample:

- Parents/Caregivers (18+) of children 11 years and under in Parent Survey-2004.
- Parents/Caregivers (18+) of children 11 years and under in Parent Survey-2006.

Data Collection Periods & Sample Size:

- Parent Survey 2004: March 4, 2004 to December 5, 2004; Sample Size: n=929
- Parent Survey 2006: April 6, 2006 to July 4, 2006; Sample Size: n=554

WHAT'S NEXT?

Data on these three modules have been collected through the RRFSS in 2007 and will continue until the end of 2008. A follow-up report is planned for 2009 to provide an update on breastfeeding practices, awareness and attitudes in Middlesex-London.