

Exclusive breastfeeding in hospital associated with longer breastfeeding duration

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Credit: University of Manitoba

New findings from AllerGen's CHILD Study show that exclusive breastfeeding during the first few days of life is positively associated with longer-term breastfeeding, while in-hospital formula use is

associated with breastfeeding for a significantly shorter duration.

Meghan Azad, an investigator with AllerGen and the Children's Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba, and an epidemiologist at the University of Manitoba, led a research team that found that breastfeeding ended earlier for infants who received [formula](#) supplementation in [hospital](#), compared to those who received only [breast milk](#) during this critical period. The findings were published this week in the journal Birth.

"Newborns who received only breast milk were ultimately [breastfed](#) for four [months](#) longer than those who received formula supplementation in hospital, and they were 63 per cent more likely to meet the World Health Organization recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding for six months," says Azad.

The researchers used data from more than 3,100 infants and their mothers participating in the CHILD Study—a Canadian birth cohort study that is tracking children from before birth to school age and beyond to identify the root causes of asthma, allergy and other chronic conditions.

Newborn feeding was documented from hospital records, and families enrolled in the CHILD study provided information about their babies' breastfeeding status and diet at three, six, 12, 18 and 24 months of age. Overall, 97 per cent of newborns were breastfed initially. Of these, 74 per cent were exclusively breastfed during their hospital stay, while 26 per cent received supplementation with formula. The exclusively breastfed newborns were ultimately breastfed for 11 months on average, compared to seven months for those receiving formula supplementation.

The researchers also discovered something not previously reported in other breastfeeding research, according to Lorena Vehling, an AllerGen trainee and first author of the study. "We found that that among women

with a lower education level, exclusive breastfeeding in hospital was particularly beneficial for extending breastfeeding duration," she says.

"The beneficial effect was twice as great among mothers with lower education. Our results suggest that programs supporting new mothers to exclusively breastfeed in hospital will facilitate sustained breastfeeding within and beyond the first year of life, and this will support a plethora of associated [health](#) benefits for these women and their children."

Maria Mackay, a Registered Nurse and lactation consultant, adds: "This excellent research addresses the impact of breastfeeding on the social determinants of health. This new finding reinforces the importance of [breastfeeding](#) in reducing health inequities across the lifespan, and it will help inform the practices of health professionals like me as we work with the parents of newborns."

Provided by University of Manitoba

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