

DC Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.

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BREASTFEEDING RATES DECLINING IN WASHINGTON, DC

CDC National Breastfeeding Report Card for 2009 released

Washington, DC –Each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) releases the Breastfeeding Report Card during World Breastfeeding Week. This Report Card provides information for each state on key breastfeeding indicators, showing where each state has been successful and where more work needs to be done to improve breastfeeding practices. The 2009 Report Card was released August 3, 2009.

The Surgeon General's federal goal for Healthy People 2010 is to increase the initiation rate and duration of any breastfeeding to 75% postpartum, 50% at 6 months, and 25% at 1 year. According to the 2009 Report Card, DC has shown slight decreases from last year in each of these areas—69.6%, 46%, and 20% (a 0.6%, 3% and 22% decrease respectively). The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the World Health Organization all recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life because of its numerous medical, psychological and economic benefits. Healthy People 2010 also aims to improve breastfeeding exclusivity rates to 40% at 3 months and 17% at 6 months. The DC rates for 2009 were 31% and 13%, respectively, and while these numbers show that there is work to do here as well they represent 12% and 48% increases from 2008. Studies have shown that when women deliver at health care facilities that encourage, support and promote breastfeeding, they are more likely to initiate breastfeeding and to breastfeed for a longer duration. Contrary to the exclusive breastfeeding goals, 28% of infants born in DC received formula before 2 days of age according to CDC.

One organization very concerned about these findings is the DC Breastfeeding Coalition. The Coalition is committed to increasing the exclusive breastfeeding rates in the District of Columbia. "Infants that leave the hospital not breastfeeding are highly unlikely to subsequently be breastfed" says Dr. Sahira Long, President of the Coalition. The Coalition is in the midst of completing its DC Breastfeeding-Friendly Hospital Initiative, a project funded by the Office on Women's Health to evaluate the policies and practices of maternity facilities in the District which best promote, support and protect breastfeeding. The first round of evaluations was completed in



September 2008 with Georgetown University Hospital being recognized as having the most breastfeeding-friendly website, policies and practices in January 2009. Each facility was offered a chance to review the criteria evaluated and initial findings during a strategic planning session conducted by members of the Coalition. Follow-up evaluations are being conducted during World Breastfeeding Week and results will be released by early September. “Changing and improving breastfeeding in the District of Columbia will take a community-wide effort—the hospitals are just a start,” said Dr. Long. “Healthcare professionals, family members, employers, childcare providers—everyone has to recognize that breastfeeding is important for the overall health of children in our community. Helping mothers to sustain breastfeeding will take all of their support and protection. “

The DC Breastfeeding Coalition, established in 2004, is a non-profit organization (www.dcbfc.org) dedicated to enhancing the health of families in the District through improved breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. It is the Coalitions' goal to promote environments that establish human lactation as a societal norm.

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