

DH releases report of Breastfeeding Survey 2021

The Department of Health (DH) today (November 23) released the report of the Breastfeeding Survey 2021 and appealed to members of the public to support breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding offers the finest and most natural nutrition for babies, benefits babies' growth and development and promotes emotional bonding between mothers and babies. The World Health Organization recommends that babies should be breastfed exclusively in the first six months. Thereafter, solid foods should be introduced gradually to fulfil babies' nutritional requirements while breastfeeding can continue until the child is 2 years old or beyond.

To monitor the local breastfeeding trends, monthly reports of breastfeeding rates were collected from public and private birthing hospitals and Breastfeeding Surveys were regularly conducted at the DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), where about 90 per cent of all babies born in Hong Kong are covered. The Breastfeeding Survey 2021 assessed breastfeeding rates in the first year of life of babies born in Hong Kong in 2020.

According to the reports from all hospitals with maternity units, the ever breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge of babies born in 2020 were 86.8 per cent and 18.9 per cent respectively.

Breastfeeding Surveys conducted at MCHCs showed that for babies born in 2020, the breastfeeding rates at 1, 2, 4, 6 and 12 months were 77.4 per cent, 66.6 per cent, 53.9 per cent, 43.1 per cent and 23.9 per cent respectively while the exclusive breastfeeding rates at 1, 2, 4 and 6 months were 28.8 per cent, 28.1 per cent, 25.6 per cent and 22.2 per cent respectively.

In a comparison with the birth cohort in 2018, the survey revealed that the exclusive breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge as well as at 1, 2, 4 and 6 months of age for the birth cohort in 2020 had dropped by around 2 to 4 percentage points.

"While there were various reasons for mothers choosing not to breastfeed, the observed decline in breastfeeding rates in the 2021 survey is likely due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic," a spokesman for the DH said.

In view of the local situation of COVID-19, breastfeeding support services in birthing hospitals and MCHCs were substantially scaled down in 2020. Social support was also reduced due to social distancing measures, the spokesman added.

The spokesman said that breastfeeding support services, including antenatal education, breastfeeding assessment and coaching, have fully

resumed in the DH's MCHCs since June this year. Health education on breastfeeding has also been strengthened through online platforms. In parallel, the Hospital Authority has gradually resumed antenatal classes and education workshops on breastfeeding.

The DH will continue to strengthen professional support for breastfeeding in MCHCs and work with other service providers to give support to breastfeeding families.

For access to the Report and more information, please visit www.fhs.gov.hk/english/reports/files/BF_survey_2021.pdf.