

# Press release: New survey of mums reveals perceived barriers to breastfeeding

Almost three-quarters of women start breastfeeding when their child is born, but this drops to 44% within 6 to 8 weeks. However, evidence shows the right support helps mums to breastfeed for longer. Public Health England (PHE) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months.

A new survey of 500 mothers of young children commissioned by PHE showed that more than half were concerned that breastfeeding could mean they wouldn't be able to tell if their baby was getting too much or not enough milk. A similar proportion of mums surveyed thought that people might assume they need a special diet to breastfeed. Nearly 3 in 10 worried that breastfeeding could mean their baby might not be getting the right nutrients, indicating why mothers may stop breastfeeding at this early point.

Breastfeeding boosts a baby's ability to fight illness and infection. Babies who are not breastfed are more likely to get diarrhoea and respiratory infections. It lowers a mother's risk of ovarian and breast cancer, and also burns around 500 calories a day.

Start4Life, PHE's marketing programme that helps parents-to-be and parents to adopt healthy behaviours, has launched a new interactive Breastfeeding Friend (BFF) ChatBot. The BFF is accessed through Facebook messenger and provides personal support for mothers at any time of the day or night to help make breastfeeding a better experience. The BFF will also dispel breastfeeding myths and help alleviate concerns mums have. The ChatBot works as a live chat tool which is able to respond to questions about breastfeeding posed by the user.

Viv Bennett, Chief Nurse at PHE said:

Breastfeeding, while natural, is something that all mums and their babies learn by doing. Mums tell us that after the first few weeks breastfeeding becomes easier, so proper support is crucial at this time, which is where our BFF is designed to help.

We can all help women feel comfortable breastfeeding their baby wherever they are. Creating a wider culture of encouragement and support will help make a mother's experience all the more positive.

The survey also confirmed that breastfeeding in public is something that mums are concerned about. The mothers polled were most likely to say that they would feel embarrassed breastfeeding in the presence of people they don't know (63%). 59% feel the same about partner's family and 49% felt it about siblings and wider family members.

Minister for Public Health and Innovation Nicola Blackwood said:

Research shows that breastfeeding gives babies the best start in life but I know it's not always easy for new mums to start. Start4Life's new interactive Facebook messenger ChatBot is a quick and easy way for mums to get help and information, and complements the ongoing support from their midwifery team and health visitor.

Jacque Gerrard, Director for England at Royal College of Midwives' said:

Getting infant feeding right will help give new-born babies the best possible start in life. Women need all the support they can get, particularly first time mothers. It is important that midwives and maternity support workers continue to promote breastfeeding. Any initiative that goes towards helping mothers start and sustain breastfeeding for longer is positive as we know the health benefits from being breastfed last a lifetime.

High-profile figures who promote breastfeeding had a positive influence on the mums polled. Household names like Sam Faiers, Fearne Cotton and Blake Lively, who have recently championed breastfeeding on social media, inspired 49% of mums to breastfeed their own babies. Two-thirds (64%) felt more confident to breastfeed in public because of celebrity mums.

For more information, advice and tips on breastfeeding visit:  
[www.nhs.uk/start4life](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life).

To access the Breastfeeding BFF, simply open Facebook Messenger and search Start4Life BreastFeeding Friend or visit [m.me/Start4LifeBreastFeedingFriend](https://m.me/Start4LifeBreastFeedingFriend) to get started.

For further information, images or interviews please contact:

1. The Start4Life Breastfeeding Friend, BFF for short, is a ChatBot accessible via Facebook Messenger, using Android or iPhones, tablets or computers. It provides answers to users' breastfeeding questions, any time of the day or night, from getting started to continuing breastfeeding after weaning. To start a chat with the Start4Life BreastFeeding Friend:
  - visit [m.me/Start4LifeBreastFeedingFriend](https://m.me/Start4LifeBreastFeedingFriend) or click on one of our Facebook ads and if you have Facebook Messenger installed, you'll be taken straight to the app to start your chat
  - open the Facebook Messenger app and search for Start4Life Breastfeeding Friend in the search bar at the top of the app
  - visit [facebook.com/Start4LifeBreastFeedingFriend](https://facebook.com/Start4LifeBreastFeedingFriend) and click 'send message' underneath our cover photo
2. In addition to the Breastfeeding BFF ChatBot, there are many other ways that mothers can get breastfeeding support. The Start4Life website has a range of advice and resources which can help mothers continue

breastfeeding, as well as a dedicated helpline they can call. Mothers can also get help through their:

- friends and family
- midwifery team
- health visitor
- local breastfeeding drop-in services

3. Facts on breastfeeding:

- PHE recommends that babies are exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months to give them the best start in life
- breast milk boosts babies' ability to fight illness and infection in their first 6 months
- breastfeeding lowers the risk of breast cancer and ovarian cancer for the mother, and also burns about 500 calories a day
- breastfeeding has a positive impact on the whole population. Moderate increases in breastfeeding would translate into cost savings for the NHS

4. TNS data was collected from 500 mothers of children aged 0 to 18 months on behalf of PHE in October 2016. The statements about breastfeeding that those surveyed most agreed with in the Start4Life survey were that:

- it could be painful (74%)
- it could prevent me from taking medication (71%)
- I wouldn't be able to tell if my baby was getting enough or too much milk (54%)
- it could tie me down and stop me doing what I want to (51%)
- I may have to eat a special diet (49%)
- I couldn't take the birth control pill (37%)
- women with breast implants are not able to breastfeed (29%)
- my baby may not be getting the necessary nutrients (27%)
- some women's breasts can be too small to be able to breastfeed (24%)
- it could stop me exercising (24%)

5. Sometimes breastfeeding isn't possible for a range of reasons. If this is the case, in terms of liquids babies should only be given infant formula milk for the first 12 months and no other types of milk.

6. Start4Life's Baby Club and [Start4Life website](#) offers NHS information and advice for parents-to-be and parents of 0 to 5 year olds providing them with the advice they need to help get their child off to the best start in life.

7. The Department of Health is also supporting Unicef UK to develop a neonatal infant feeding network to support sick and preterm babies.

8. [Public Health England](#) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. Follow us on Twitter: [@PHE\\_uk](#) and Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland](http://www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland).