



Breastfeeding

1. Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Department of Health recommend that all babies are exclusively breastfed for the first six months (26 weeks) of their life, the optimal duration for exclusive breastfeeding. Breast milk is widely considered to be the best source of nutrition for infants. After this period, breastfeeding should continue for as long as the mother and baby wish, while gradually introducing a more varied diet.

Breastfeeding is a cost-effective intervention as it can contribute to savings through reduced hospital admissions for gastrointestinal or respiratory infections and has been linked to delivering better long-term outcomes for children by, for example, reducing rates of childhood obesity and improving infant mental health.

Improving rates of breastfeeding is a complex process that requires a multifaceted approach, involving a network of clinicians, health professionals, children's services, local businesses, community partners, volunteers, mothers, babies and their families. To be effective, this work needs to respond to the diverse needs of the population and offer targeted support to mothers and babies in different settings.

2. The Local Picture

Compared with the rest of England, rates of breastfeeding in Hounslow reflect the generally high rates of breastfeeding in London. In 2010/11, London had the highest rate of breastfeeding initiation at 86%, compared with 74% for England as a whole. ([Table 1](#)) Rates of breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks in London were 65%, compared with the England average of 46%.

In Hounslow, the rate of breastfeeding initiation was 85% during 2010/11. At 6-8 weeks, 64% of all infants were either totally or partially breastfed (this rises to 69% if analysis is restricted to infants where their breastfeeding status was known). ([Table 1](#)) Rates of breastfeeding vary within Hounslow, with lower uptake rates associated with young teenage mothers and low income. White British mothers more likely to stop breastfeeding sooner, compared with other ethnic groups.

The reduction in breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks compared with rates of initiation is common to all Local Authorities in England, but some caution is needed in assessing these rates due to issues around data quality and variations in data collection.

3. Strategic Leadership and Collaboration

Improving the uptake of breastfeeding in Hounslow is the remit of the Breastfeeding and Immunisation Steering Group. This group consists of Commissioners, Public Health, health professionals and National Childbirth Trust (NCT) representatives. The Group meets monthly and members work together to implement the Breastfeeding Action Plan for Hounslow 2011/12. The Action Plan was informed by the North West London Cluster



Breastfeeding Strategy 2011-2016 (not yet published online), which ensures a coordinated approach to implementing breastfeeding strategies across North West London.

The current manual data collection of breastfeeding data on the 6-8 weeks target is inadequate and time-consuming. Work is ongoing to improve this situation through new electronic data collection.

Peer-support programmes in areas of low-uptake are needed as research shows their effectiveness and cost-effectiveness in increasing uptake. NCT are currently recruiting peer supporters for their breastfeeding peer support programme, which will be aimed at an area of low breastfeeding uptake in Hounslow. Children's Centres and GP practices should also work towards UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation.

The London-wide Infant Feeding Network continues to provide a forum for stakeholders to engage on breastfeeding issues.

3.1 *Improving breastfeeding*

- The West Middlesex University Hospital is accredited with the Baby Friendly Initiative, which accredits health-care facilities that adopt internationally recognised best practice standards for breastfeeding).
- Within the community, a health visitor specialising in infant feeding runs breastfeeding clinics across Hounslow. Additional support is commissioned from the NCT to provide further 'drop-in' clinics across the Borough and a peer support programme. These breastfeeding clinics are well attended and continual promotion and facilitation of access is ongoing.
- There is a London-wide Infant Feeding Network that meets regularly and provides a forum for stakeholders to engage around the issues of breastfeeding.

4. **Priorities**

Hounslow's Breastfeeding Action Plan for 2011/12 focuses on the following:

- Continue to improve data collection through a new electronic data collection process (System One), planned to be in operation from April 2012;
- Provide a targeted peer support programme to an identified area of need to improve uptake of breastfeeding;
- Increase the number of breastfeeding friendly places in Hounslow in keeping with the WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation;
- Implementing Baby Friendly Initiative training standards and improving workforce; and
- Improve promotion through public engagement.

5. **Summary of Need**

The table summarising the needs in this area has not been completed as it is not considered applicable to Breastfeeding.