



7/2022

# BREASTFEEDING

## ISSUE BRIEF

### BACKGROUND

Breast milk is unique and the most complete form of nutrition for infants. Breastfeeding strengthens the infant’s immune system, promotes bonding, and helps with postpartum recovery. However, not all families can breastfeed their new infants. While breastfeeding is natural, it requires time, support, and resources.

### RHODE ISLAND DATA

The Rhode Island Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (RI-PRAMS) collects information each year on women’s experiences before, during, and after pregnancy. Women are picked by chance to complete a survey about two to six months after having a baby. The survey includes questions on breastfeeding and other experiences related to their pregnancy and baby.

#### *Rhode Island excels when it comes to starting breastfeeding after birth.*

Among Rhode Island women who gave birth in 2016-2020, 89.2% breastfed for at least a short period of time. This is much more than the Healthy People 2020 goal of at least 81.9%.

#### *Reasons for never breastfeeding*

Women who reported never breastfeeding were asked why they didn’t. About one in four women who never breastfed said it was because they didn’t like it, and 43% said they didn’t want to breastfeed. But many women reported barriers to breastfeeding, such as having to care for other children or having to return to work or school (Figure 1). Improving Rhode Island’s existing policies to help more families access paid family leave and high-quality, reliable, affordable child care would benefit families in many ways, including by making breastfeeding easier.

**Figure 1.** Reasons for not breastfeeding, as selected by Rhode Island new mothers, 2016-2020



Data source: Rhode Island Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (RI-PRAMS), 2016-2020



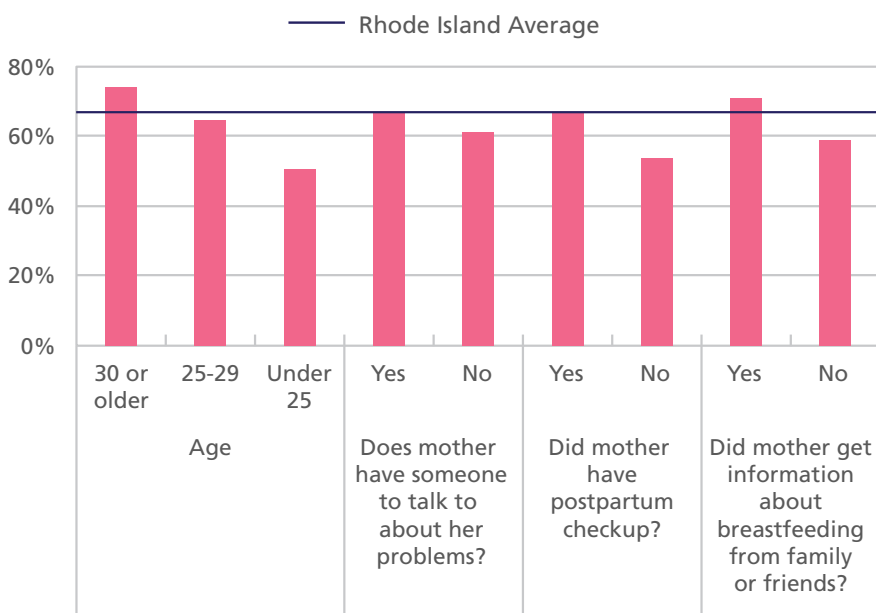
## More women stop breastfeeding in the first two months after birth.

Although a high percentage of infants in Rhode Island are breastfed at some point after birth, some women breastfeed for only a few days or a few weeks. Slightly more than two-thirds (67.3%) of women breastfeed for at least two months.

RI-PRAMS does not ask women why they stopped breastfeeding, but we can see some characteristics associated with it. For instance, younger women and women who did not have a postpartum check-up were less likely to breastfeed for at least two months.

These data suggest that breastfeeding isn't just a personal choice for all families. Many families may need more social supports to continue breastfeeding.

**Figure 2.** Percent of Rhode Island women who gave birth in 2016-2020 who breastfed for at least two months



Data source: Rhode Island Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (RI-PRAMS), 2016-2020



For more information, visit:  
[www.health.ri.gov/breastfeeding](http://www.health.ri.gov/breastfeeding)  
or call the Health Information Line at:  
401-222-5960 / RI Relay 711.

## WHAT POLICYMAKERS CAN DO TO HELP

- Advocate for improving and extending paid family leave.
- Inform the public of the laws and protections surrounding breastfeeding.
- Educate employers on the benefits of having a breastfeeding policy in the workplace in compliance with state and federal laws.
- Support efforts to educate families about the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Increase and diversify the lactation support workforce.

## WHAT PROVIDERS CAN DO TO HELP

- Advocate for improving and extending paid family leave.
- Avoid advertising or promoting infant formula.
- Ensure that breastfeeding is promoted and supported at every visit to a hospital or clinic.
- Take part in writing healthcare standards supporting individuals who want to breastfeed.
- Identify and refer families for breastfeeding support services through the WIC Program, Family Visiting, hospital maternity services, doulas, private lactation consultants, and community organizations.

## WHAT FAMILIES CAN DO

- Learn about breastfeeding. Take classes and speak with lactation providers, family, and friends with personal experience.
- Get support. Ask about breastfeeding support resources in your community. For more information, visit [www.health.ri.gov/breastfeeding](http://www.health.ri.gov/breastfeeding) or call the Health Information Line at 401-222-5960 / RI Relay 711.
- Discuss your infant feeding plan with family, providers, a doula, birthing hospital staff, and your employer.
- Many families may face challenges. Ask for help along the way!