

State Health Department Issues Call To Action To Promote Breastfeeding In New York

ALBANY, NY (August 6, 2009)--State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D. today called on all healthcare providers to join the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and other stakeholders in efforts to increase awareness, reduce barriers, and improve knowledge and skills in promoting and supporting exclusive breastfeeding. During Breastfeeding Week, a Call to Action was made by DOH's Deputy Commissioner Guthrie S. Birkhead, M.D. at the Breastfeeding Grand Rounds held today at the School of Public Health, State University of New York at Albany.

"Improving the health of all New Yorkers is a priority," said Commissioner Daines. "Ensuring that New York mothers, health care providers, employers and all New Yorkers recognize the importance of breastfeeding is essential to giving future generations of New Yorkers a healthy start in life."

Under Governor Paterson's leadership, DOH is taking specific actions to increase breastfeeding initiation and exclusive breastfeeding because of the proven health benefits and the potential health care cost savings.

"Research demonstrates that exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life with continued breastfeeding during the second six months provides optimal health benefits," said Deputy Commissioner Guthrie S. Birkhead, M.D. "Breastfeeding has been shown to improve infant growth and development, and is associated with reductions in sudden infant death syndrome; common childhood illnesses, such as ear infections, eczema, pneumonia and diarrhea; and chronic conditions, including obesity and type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Breastfeeding also benefits mothers by reducing the risk of breast and ovarian cancers."

To assure that breastfed infants and their families get off to the best possible start, DOH will be collaborating with the Regional Perinatal Centers statewide to provide training to health care providers and staff at hospitals providing maternity services on breastfeeding education, lactation support and ways to improve hospital policies, systems and environments to increase breastfeeding rates.

To support low-income families, DOH is taking steps to ensure that pregnant women and new mothers are aware of changes recently made to the State's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to better support breastfeeding. Certified lactation counselors, in addition to peer counselors, are now available at all WIC clinics to provide breastfeeding education and lactation support. Additionally, the supplemental food package provided to lactating women and breastfeeding infants over 6 months of age has been enhanced.

DOH is also reviewing the written breastfeeding policies and infant feeding and breastfeeding rates at each hospital. This information will be provided initially to each hospital, and after a

two-month review, the infant feeding and breastfeeding rates will be available on the Department's website.

Stephanie Sosnowski, President of the New York Statewide Breastfeeding Coalition, said: "We want to encourage new mothers to exclusively breastfeed for as long as possible. We know that the type of breastfeeding support that new mothers and families receive in the hospital is critical in sustaining breastfeeding after hospital discharge. We also know that many women are fighting an uphill battle to continue breastfeeding in a society where breastfeeding is not fully acknowledged as the norm and as the best method of infant feeding. It's important that we work towards removing barriers to exclusive breastfeeding both in and out of the hospital."

Henry Schaeffer, M.D., FAAP, and Chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics, New York District II, said: "Improved hospital support for new mothers and training of health professionals will help mothers in our state breastfeed exclusively and for longer duration, ultimately improving health and saving money."

Mark Krotowski, M.D, President of the New York State Academy of Family Physicians, said: "Breastfeeding strengthens the maternal-infant bond while providing important nutrition and vital supplements to keep the infant healthy, happy and protected. Family physicians support and recommend women to breastfeed their newborn infants."

Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding during the second six months is the recommended feeding method for optimal infant growth and development. While 70-80 percent of New York's new mothers initially choose to breastfeed their newborns, a level that is consistent with the *Healthy People 2010* goals of 75 percent, the rates of exclusive breastfeeding in New York are only 26 percent at three months and 8 percent at 6 months.

Supplementing breastfed newborn infants with formula is detrimental to breastfeeding exclusivity and duration. Breastfed infants who are supplemented with formula during their hospital stay are half as likely to be still breastfeeding at 6 weeks of age as infants who are exclusively breastfed in the hospital.

More information about the importance of breastfeeding is available at <http://www.nyhealth.gov/community/pregnancy/breastfeeding/index.htm>.