

## World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 1-7 August 2023

### Enabling Breastfeeding: Making a Difference for Working Parents

#### WBW Annual Survey Summary

#### Survey Content

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association (BFHIHKA) was incorporated in 1994 to promote, protect and support breastfeeding in Hong Kong. As part of the World Breastfeeding Week activity, BFHIHKA conducts an annual survey on the Breastfeeding Rates on discharge from hospitals with maternity units and also their practice of the “Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding”.

#### Breastfeeding Rate of newborns on discharge from hospital

Births in 2022	Breastfeeding Rate		Exclusive Breastfeeding Rate	
	%	Range %	%	Range %
Public hospitals	79.08	70-88	21.94	14-29
Private hospitals	93.42	90-98	5.04	0-51
<b>Total</b>	<b>84.71</b>	<b>70-98</b>	<b>15.30</b>	<b>0-51</b>

#### Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding

Steps with a difference of 10% or more compared with the previous year:

#### Improvement:

Nil

#### Deterioration:

- 4.2. Babies who have been delivered by caesarean section with general anaesthesia are placed skin-to-skin with their mothers as soon as the mothers are responsive and alert (with 1 less hospital providing information)
- 6.1. Breastfeeding babies receive no other food or drink unless medically indicated.



## Report on WBW Survey 2023

### Introduction

The Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) was launched by WHO and UNICEF in 1991 following the Innocenti Declaration of 1990. The initiative is a global effort to implement practices that protect, promote and support breastfeeding. Hospitals with maternity units that implement the WHO/UNICEF Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (Ten Steps) and comply with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly resolutions (the Code) could apply for designation as baby-friendly hospitals. Since its launch, BFHI's Ten Steps have become a global guidance with more than 20,000 maternity facilities having been designated as "baby-friendly". The initiative has measurable and proven impact, increasing the likelihood of babies being exclusively breastfed for the first six months according to WHO's Global strategy for infant and young child feeding. Furthermore, the initiative has been extended from hospitals to community facilities.

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association (BFHIHKA) started the programme of designating health facilities as baby-friendly in 2013. Since then, seven public hospitals have been designated as baby-friendly hospitals in Hong Kong with three having undergone revalidation. Hence around 91% of births in public hospitals and 55% in the entire territory were in baby-friendly hospitals in 2022. The other one public hospital with maternity unit and one private hospital are at different stages of designation. To better support mothers in the antenatal and postnatal periods, Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) are also joining the programme. Three MCHCs have already been designated as baby-friendly MCHCs and undergone revalidation, while twelve others have started the process.<sup>1</sup>

Countries around the world celebrate the World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) from 1-7 August every year. The theme of WBW this year is "Enabling breastfeeding: Making a difference for working parents"<sup>2</sup> which focus on breastfeeding and employment or work. The theme highlights the impact of paid leave, workplace support and emerging parenting norms on breastfeeding; and the critical role of government, policymakers, workplaces, communities and parents in empowering families and sustaining breastfeeding-friendly environments in the post-pandemic work life.

BFHIHKA takes this opportunity every year to conduct a survey to monitor practices that support breastfeeding before mothers are discharged from maternity units in Hong Kong.

### Method

The 8 public and 11 private hospitals in Hong Kong providing maternity service in 2022 were invited to participate in our annual survey. The survey was a self-assessment and covered the following areas:

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<sup>1</sup> Progress of designation of baby-friendly health facilities <https://www.babyfriendly.org.hk/en/healthcare-facilities/>

<sup>2</sup> World Breastfeeding Week 2023. World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action. <https://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>

## Breastfeeding rate

### *The breastfeeding rate of newborns on discharge from hospital*

Each hospital reported on the number of live births in the hospital in 2022 and the breastfeeding rate upon discharge for that year. The breastfeeding rate was defined as the number of babies that were breastfeeding on the day of discharge divided by the total number of live births.

### *Exclusive breastfeeding rate in hospital*

Each hospital is to report on their exclusive breastfeeding rate for live births in 2022. The exclusive breastfeeding rate was defined as the number of breastfed babies not given any food or drink other than breastmilk before discharge, divided by the total number of live births.

For babies that had been admitted into the neonatal unit from birth or from the postnatal ward, unless they were discharged earlier, their feeding status was captured at the age of one month.

## The implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in 2023

In 1989, the World Health Organization and UNICEF issued a joint statement titled “Promoting, Protecting and Supporting Breastfeeding: The Special Role of Maternity Services” with a set of guidelines for maternity units to follow in order to provide optimal breastfeeding support to mothers. This set of guidelines is called the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (Ten Steps). The Ten Steps were revised in 2018<sup>3</sup> but as hospitals need time to make the transition, they were asked to complete a questionnaire on how they were implementing the Ten Steps based on the previous version except that Step 10 was updated.

## Results

All 8 public and 11 private hospitals invited participated in our survey.

### Survey Population

	<i>No. of births in 2022</i>	<i>No. of births in 2021</i>
Public hospitals (8)	19,730	23,374
Private hospitals (11)	12,766	13,558
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,496</b>	<b>36,932</b>

<sup>3</sup> Implementation guidance: protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding in facilities providing maternity and new-born services – the revised Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241513807>



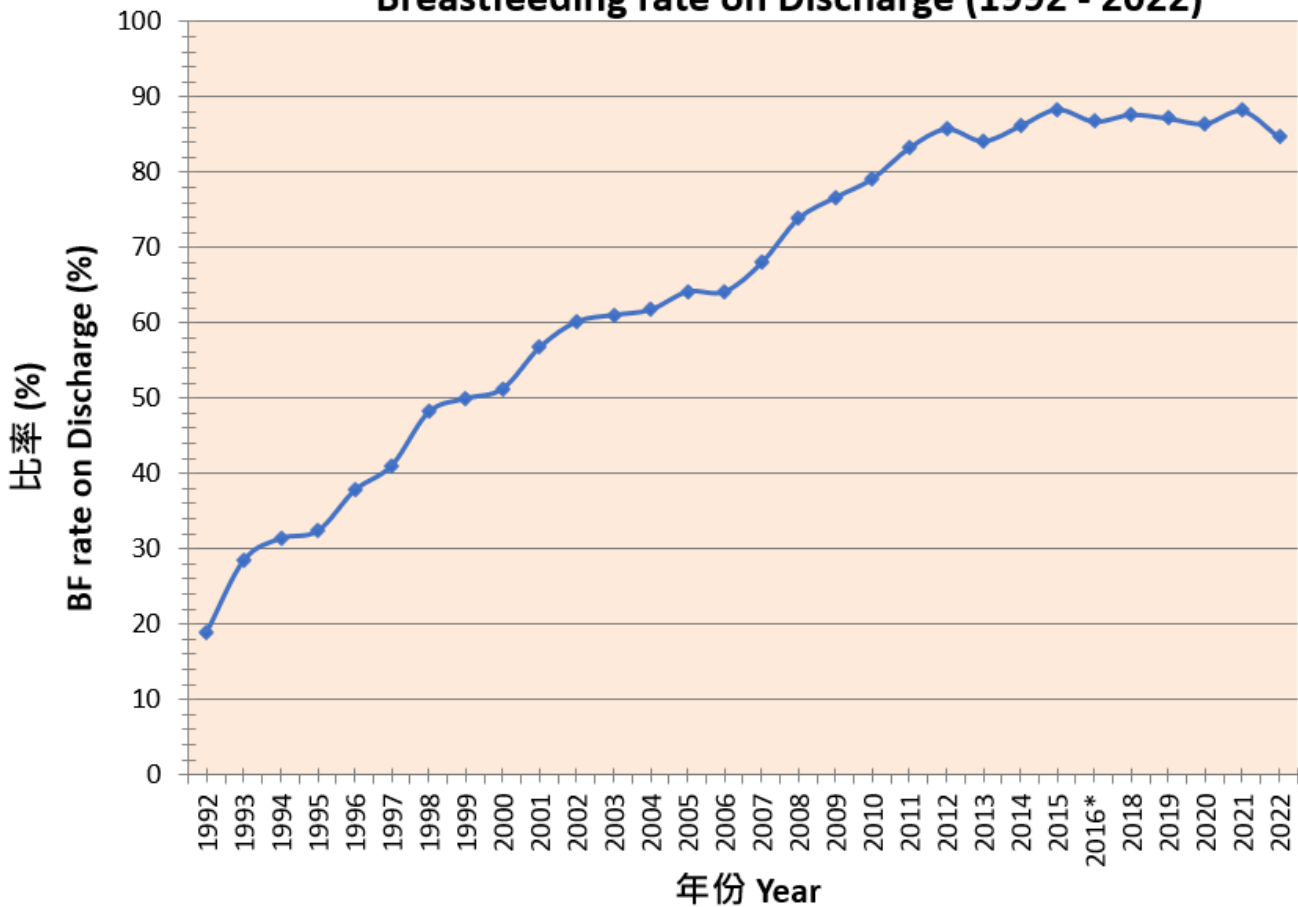
Breastfeeding rate

*Breastfeeding rate on discharge from hospital*

The breastfeeding rate, whether exclusive or mixed, on discharge from hospital for births in 2022 from all public and private hospitals in Hong Kong was 84.71%. For public hospitals the rate was 79.08%; for private hospitals, the rate was 93.42%.

**本港母乳餵哺率 (出院計)**

**Breastfeeding rate on Discharge (1992 - 2022)**



2016\*The statistics was from the Department of Health of the Government of HKSAR

*Exclusive breastfeeding rate in hospital*

The rate in public hospitals was 21.94% for the year with a range of 14 to 29%. For private hospitals the rate was 5.04% with a range from none to 51%. The overall exclusive breastfeeding rate was 15.3% for both public and private hospitals.

## **The implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in 2023<sup>4</sup> (Appendix I)**

### ***STEP 1 - Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff***

All public hospitals have a written breastfeeding policy that is displayed publicly and routinely communicated to all health care staff. Among all private hospitals, 18% of which do not have a written policy while 27% do not have the policy displayed in public.

### ***STEP 2 - Train all health care staff in skills necessary to implement this policy***

All public and private hospitals thought their staff are acquainted with the policy. 96% of obstetric nurses and 94% of paediatric nurses received at least 20 hours training in public hospitals while 89% of obstetric nurses and 83% (among 9 hospitals with information) of paediatric nurses received such training in the private sector.

For doctors' training, 94% of obstetric doctors and 91% of paediatric doctors received at least 8 hours training in public hospitals, while 57% of obstetric doctors and 44% of paediatric doctors received such training in 5 private hospitals that provided the information.

### ***STEP 3 - Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding***

Nearly all pregnant women, 91% in public and 99% in private hospitals received information about the advantages and management of breastfeeding. One of the private hospitals still give group instructions on artificial feeding.

### ***STEP 4 - Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within half an hour of birth***

For mothers with vaginal births and Caesarean Section without general anaesthesia, 47% in public hospitals and 53% in 10 private hospitals with information undertook skin-to-skin contact with their new-borns for at least one hour within 5 minutes after birth. For mothers who had a Caesarean Section under general anaesthesia, 22% of them in public hospitals and 48% of them in 9 private hospitals with information had skin-to-skin contact with their babies when they were responsive and alert.

### ***STEP 5 - Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infants***

All public and private hospitals are offering mothers help to breastfeed within six hours of delivery and help mothers to maintain lactation if their babies are admitted to the special care unit.

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<sup>4</sup> Percentages given are averages of all that are provided by hospitals unless otherwise stated.



***STEP 6 - Give new-born infants no food or drink other than breastmilk, unless medically indicated***

75% of public and 64% private hospitals are not offering any food or drink other than breastmilk to breastfed babies unless medically indicated. All hospitals do not receive free or low-cost supplies of breastmilk substitutes. All public hospitals and private hospitals do not have promotions of infant foods or drinks other than breastmilk.

***STEP 7 - Practise rooming-in – allow mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day***

All public hospitals and 36% of private hospitals practise 24-hour rooming-in of mothers and babies with normal vaginal delivery from birth. 37% of babies in public hospitals with a range of 27 to 48%, and 4% in 9 private hospitals with information with a range of 1-10% were separated from mothers for medical reasons. No public hospital maintains a nursery in the postnatal ward for healthy babies, but all maternity units in private hospitals still keep a nursery for healthy babies.

***STEP 8 - Encourage breastfeeding on demand (responsive feeding)***

All public hospitals encourage responsive breastfeeding while 36% of private hospitals do so.

***STEP 9 - Give no artificial teats or pacifiers (also called dummies or soothers) to breastfeeding infants***

All public hospitals and 82% of private hospitals do not use bottles with artificial teats or pacifiers for breastfed babies.

***STEP 10 – Coordinate discharge so that parents and their infants have timely access to ongoing support and care***

All public and private hospitals informed breastfeeding mothers how to access support in the community and coordinate with services that provide clinical management. 50% of public hospitals and 73% of private hospitals coordinate with mother-to-mother support.

Hospitals were also asked whether they were implementing the Ten Steps and how the implementation could be improved. All public and private hospitals considered themselves as having implemented Ten Steps. For those already in the BFHI programme, showed concern on how to enhance skin-to-skin contact of mothers and babies in every setting including the operating theatre, postnatal ward, and neonatal unit; reduce non-medically indicated supplementation, support separated mothers and infants, and improve staff competency. Those not in the programme focused more on staff training and better support women on breastfeeding at different stages.



## Discussion

Although the situation was more controlled, Hong Kong was still under the shadow of COVID-19 in the previous year. Births in 2022 was 12% less than 2021. Compared with the year before, the breastfeeding rate on discharge dropped from 88.2% to 84.71% and the exclusive breastfeeding rate dropped from 18.5% to 15.3%<sup>5</sup>. The rate of separation of mothers and babies for medical reasons remain high in public hospitals with different restrictions for mothers visiting babies admitted to the neonatal units. Most private hospitals continue to keep healthy babies in nurseries instead of rooming-in with mothers that makes responsive feeding more difficult.

For the implementation of the Ten Steps in 2023, two hospitals still do not have a written infant feeding policy while an additional one hospital do not display the policy publicly. Communicating an explicit policy including all Ten Steps and the Code to the staff and public is the essential first step.

It is good that there is an apparent increase in training for Paediatric nurses (with 1 more hospital provide information) and Obstetric doctors in the private sector in 2023 compared with 2022.

There is still 1 hospital provide group instructions on artificial feeding which gives the erroneous message that artificial feeding is the norm.

For skin-to-skin contact in Caesarean deliveries under general anaesthesia, there is apparent deterioration in the the year 2022 with the percentages widely vary from none to 60% among public hospitals and none to 100% in private hospitals. There is much experience to be shared among hospitals to benefit more mothers and babies.

More formula supplementation to newborns is reported by hospitals with the decrease of exclusive breastfeeding rate in the previous year. It is likely that mothers' request for supplementation is increasing. More effort to help mothers understanding the disadvantages of formula supplementation and provide practical support to mothers ensuring effective breastfeeding are essential.

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<sup>5</sup> 2022 World Breastfeeding Week Survey Report. BFHIHK.

[https://www.babyfriendly.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-WBW-Annual-Survey\\_E.pdf](https://www.babyfriendly.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-WBW-Annual-Survey_E.pdf)

All hospitals give information to mothers about where to seek help with infant feeding after discharge, but there are difficulties in promoting in person mother-to-mother support during the pandemic.

With the programme of BFHI, almost all public hospitals and some private hospitals understand what the Ten Steps entail. The establishment of breastfeeding policy with a monitoring system to the implementation is the starting point. This policy needs to be communicated to both the health care staff and the public also. As BFHI programme is a continuous quality care programme, a system-in-place to record and monitor the policy implementation can help to keep tracking the progress and evaluation for practice improvement. Those hospitals and clinics that have undergone the programme can share their experience with the other units. There are Steps that really need hospital administrative support such as staff training and 24-hour rooming in. For this service and practice modification, staff are empowered to support mothers to practice the responsive feeding and thus can improve the exclusive breastfeeding.

### Concluding Remarks

The tide of pandemic of COVID-19 is over and the health care system has learned a lot how to manage the situation. We are looking forward that with more hospitals and clinics undergone the BFHI programme, this programme in supporting breastfeeding can move much faster. Hong Kong's birth rate continues to decline, the health foundation of our next generation and our community depends on the actions we take now.



**Appendix I: Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (BF)**  
**(Self-Appraisal by Hospitals)**

Survey year	Hospital %			
	2023			2022
	Public	Private	All	All
<b>1. Written BF Policy routinely communicated to all health care staff</b>				
1.1) With explicit written notice	100	82	90	90
1.2) BF policy displayed publicly	100	73	84	79
<b>2. Train all health care staff</b>				
2.1) Acquainted with BF policy	100	100	100	100
2.2) 20-hr training given to staff within six months of their arrival				
2.2a) % of O&G nursing staff	96	89	92	93
2.2b) % of Paediatric nursing staff	94	83(H:9)	88(H:17)	82(H:16)
2.3) 8-hr training given to staff within six months of their arrival				
2.3a) % of O&G doctors	94	57(H:5)	80(H:13)	77(H:13)
2.3b) % of Paediatric doctors	91	44(H:5)	73(H:13)	70(H:13)
<b>3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits &amp; management of BF</b>				
3.1) % of pregnant clients informed	91	99	95	96
3.2) Give group instruction on artificial feeding	0	9	5	5
<b>4. Help mothers initiate BF within half an hour of birth</b>				
4.1) Vaginal or Caesarean deliveries without general anaesthesia (skin-to-skin) - % of mothers who had skin-to-skin contact within 5 minutes and $\geq 1$ hour	47	53(H:10)	50(H:18)	59(H:18)
4.2) Caesarean deliveries with general anaesthesia (skin to skin when mother responsive) - % of mothers	22	48(H:9)	36(H:17)	49(H:18)



<b>5. Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infant</b>				
5.1) Offer breastfeeding assistance within six hours of delivery	100	100	100	100
5.2) Help mothers of babies in special care maintain lactation	100	100	100	100
<b>6. Give newborn only breast-milk, unless medically indicated</b>				
6.1) Given newborn infants no food or drink other than breast-milk	75	64	68	79
6.2) No free or low-cost supplies of breast-milk substitutes accepted	100	100	100	100
6.3) No promotion of infant foods or drinks other than breast-milk	100	100	100	100
<b>7. Practise rooming-in – allow mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day</b>				
7.1) Mothers and babies with normal vaginal delivery are rooming-in from birth	100	36	63	63
7.2) All mothers and babies stayed in the same room day and night	100	27	58	63
7.3) % of mothers and babies separated for medical reasons	37	4(H:9)	20(H:17)	21(H:17)
7.4) There is a nursery in postnatal ward for healthy infants	0	100	58	58
<b>8. Encourage responsive (or demand) breastfeeding</b>	100	36	63	63
<b>9. Give no artificial teats or pacifiers to BF infants</b>	100	82	90	84
<b>10. Coordinate discharge so that parents and their infants have timely access to ongoing support and care</b>				
10.1) Breastfeeding mothers are informed where they can access breastfeeding support in the community	100	100	100	100
10.2) Facilities coordinate with community services that provide breastfeeding/infant feeding support including				
10.2a) clinical management	100	100	100	100
10.2b) mother-to-mother support	50	73	63	68

Remarks:

Public hospitals with maternity unit: 8

Private hospitals with maternity unit: 11

All hospitals gave a response unless “H”, no. of hospitals providing information stated