Breastfeeding has been shown to promote the health and development of infants, as well as their immunity to disease. It also confers a number of maternal health benefits, such as a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers and other chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease.\textsuperscript{1,2} The American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Breastfeeding recommends exclusive breastfeeding—with no supplemental food or liquids—through the first 6 months of life and continued breastfeeding through at least the first year.\textsuperscript{3} One study indicated that suboptimal breastfeeding rates in the United States add an estimated $2.2 billion dollars annually to direct medical costs.\textsuperscript{4}

While three-quarters of infants born in 2010 were ever breastfed (76.5 percent), slightly less than half (49.0 percent) were fed breast milk for the first 6 months of life, and 16.4 percent were exclusively breastfed for that duration. Breastfeeding practices vary considerably by maternal race and ethnicity, age, and education. With respect to race and ethnicity, the proportion of infants to have ever been breastfed was higher among Asian, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White infants (84.8, 77.9, and 78.8 percent, respectively) than non-Hispanic Black infants (61.9 percent; figure 1).

Infants born to mothers aged 30 years or older were most likely to have been breastfed (80.9 percent), while children born to mothers under 20 years of age were least likely to have ever been breastfed (51.3 percent; figure 2). Similarly, 17.9 percent of infants born to mothers aged 30 years or older breastfed exclusively at 6 months, compared to 5.8 percent of infants born to mothers younger than age 20.

With regard to maternal education, the proportion of infants to have ever been breastfed and to have been breastfed exclusively at 6 months was highest among those born to mothers with at least a college education (88.7 and 21.8 percent, respectively). Common barriers to exclusive breastfeeding include maternal employment, pain related to breastfeeding, and unsupportive hospital policies.\textsuperscript{5} The Affordable Care Act requires most health insurance plans to provide breastfeeding support, counseling, and equipment to pregnant and nursing women.\textsuperscript{6}

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**Figure 1. Infants* Who Are Breastfed, by Race/Ethnicity and Duration, 2010**

*Includes only infants born in 2010; data are provisional. **Reported that the child was ever breastfed or fed human breast milk. †Exclusive breastfeeding is defined as only human breast milk—no solids, water, or other liquids. ‡Includes Hispanics.
**Figure 2. Infants* Who Are Breastfed, by Maternal Age and Duration, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maternal Age</th>
<th>Ever Breastfed**</th>
<th>Any at 6 Months</th>
<th>Exclusively at 6 Months†</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20 Years</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29 Years</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Years and Older</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes only infants born in 2010; data are provisional. **Reported that the child was ever breastfed or fed human breast milk. †Exclusive breastfeeding is defined as only human breast milk—no solids, water, or other liquids.

**Data Sources**

Figure 1 and 2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Immunization Survey (NIS). Unpublished data. The 2010 provisional rates are based on the landline telephone sample in NIS to maintain comparability with previous years in the decade when only a landline sample was available.

**Endnotes**


**Suggested Citation**