



The Breastfeeding Committee for Canada
The National Authority for the WHO/UNICEF
Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative in Canada

Breastfeeding Definitions and Data Collection Periods

Introduction:

This breastfeeding definitions and data collection periods guideline was developed by the Provincial / Territorial subcommittee of the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada to contribute to a database for describing the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding in Canada. Monitoring the intake of breastmilk is a health indicator – useful in planning, implementing and evaluating the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding and thus the health of our infant population. Most health regions / health authorities in Canada are collecting or planning to collect breastfeeding information. It is hoped that this document will facilitate data collection that is consistent and can be used to compare breastfeeding practices between regions and provinces/territories. Developed from the population health perspective the definitions and process for data collection are simple so that many individuals can collect relevant, accurate and consistent data.

Following a review of the literature and consultation with additional experts the WHO definitions form the basis of the breastfeeding definitions in this document.¹⁻⁹ They describe the breastmilk intake of infants and do not include how the infant has received the breastmilk nor specify the types of other food or liquid.

The algorithm provided is a guideline for data collection and is specific for infants to the age of six months.

Breastfeeding Definitions:

Breastmilk includes breastfeeding, expressed breastmilk or donor milk and undiluted drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicines.

Exclusive breastmilk – no food or liquid other than breastmilk, not even water, is given to the infant from birth by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter.^{10,11}

Total breastmilk – no food or liquid other than breastmilk, not even water, is given to the infant from birth by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter during the past 7 days. *(This definition identifies infants who are exclusively breastfeeding at the time of data collection but not from birth. There are many infants who initially receive a supplement(s) at some point but exclusively breastfeed following this temporary intervention. However, based on the above definition they can no longer be classified as having exclusive breastmilk).*

Predominant breastmilk – breastmilk, given by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter **plus** 1 or a maximum of 2 feeds of any food or liquid including non-human milk, during the past 7 days.

Partial breastmilk – breastmilk, given by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter **plus** 3 or more feeds of any food or liquid including non-human milk, during the past 7 days.

No breastmilk – the infant/child receives no breastmilk.

Recommended Times to Collect Infant Feeding Data

For *Baby-Friendly*TM designation, hospitals are required to record data on initiation rates and rates of exclusive breastfeeding on discharge. In supporting the recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding to six months and the need to collect consistent breastfeeding data in the community setting the recommended time frames for data collection up to six months are shown in bold type. While precision in time is considered important, it is realized that the community data will not be collected precisely at two weeks, two months etc. for every mother and baby. To facilitate standardizing the time frames that the recommended data should be recorded a mutually exclusive description of each time period is included.

Age of Infant at recommended data collection time periods:

- Initiation – at birth**
- Hospital/clinic discharge (not applicable for home births)**
- 2 weeks – includes the period between hospital discharge to 4 weeks**
- 2 months - includes the period between 5 weeks and 12 weeks**
- 6 months – includes the period between 21 weeks and 27 weeks**

Additional data collection time periods (optional):

- 4 months – includes the period between 13 weeks and 20 weeks
- 8 months – includes the period between 28 weeks and 40 weeks
- 12 months – includes the period of 11 to 15 months
- 18 months – includes the period of 16 to 21 months
- 24 months – includes the period of 22 to 25 months

Footnote: Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended to 6 months of age. After six months breastfeeding should be continued with the introduction of complementary solids.

Rationale regarding essential time frames for data collection:

2 weeks – A critical time frame for women to receive support for continuation of breastfeeding (i.e. many cease breastfeeding prematurely due to lack of appropriate support)

2 months – An important time for support of exclusive breastfeeding and counsel regarding the recommendation of delaying the introduction of complementary foods until the infant is six months of age.

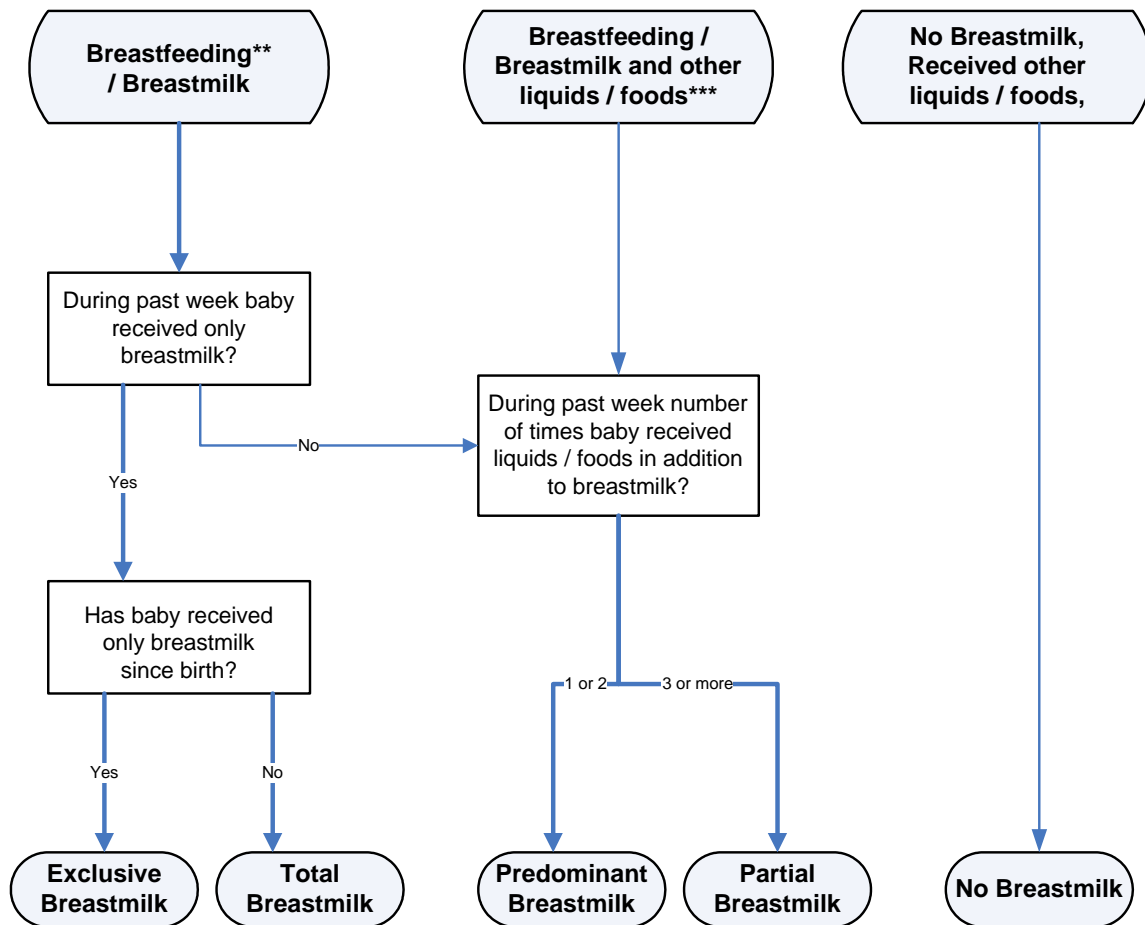
6 months – An important time for reinforcing breastfeeding to one year and beyond and appropriate introduction of complementary foods.

The recommended time frames have been suggested but this does not preclude Health Regions/Authorities collecting data at the additional times provided.

References:

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3. Labbok, M. What is the definition of breastfeeding? *Breastfeeding Abs*: 19(3):19-21, 2000.
4. Labbok M & Krasovec K. Towards consistency in breastfeeding definitions. *Stud Fam Plann* 1990; 21(4):226-30.
5. Labbok MH & Coffin CJ. A call for consistency in definition of breastfeeding behaviors. *Soc Sci Med* 1997 44:1931-32.
6. Martens, PJ. "Real World" breastfeeding definitions – where the clinician meets the survey researcher. *Current Issues in Clinical Lactations* 2000;15-23.
7. World Health Organization. Indicators for assessing breastfeeding practices. *Report of an informal meeting in June 1991*. Geneva, Author.
8. World Health Organization. *WHO Global Data Bank on Breastfeeding*. 1996; Geneva: Author.
9. World Health Organization. *WHO Global Data Bank on Breastfeeding*. Updated 2003. http://www.who.int/nut/db_bfd.htm.
10. Breastfeeding Committee for Canada. *The Baby-FriendlyTM Initiative in Community Health Services: A Canadian Implementation Guide*. 2002
11. World Health Organization. *WHO Global Data Bank on Breastfeeding*. Updated 2003.

What Baby Has Been Fed*



*Interpretation for **hospital births at discharge** – What baby has been fed since birth? The ‘predominant’ and ‘partial’ breastmilk categories *may* be combined to make one category (both) in hospital records.

*Interpretation in **Community Health settings** – What baby has been fed during the past 7 days? The above categories will provide a ‘snapshot’ of feeding practices for infants at a specific time frame.

**Breastmilk includes breastfeeding, expressed breastmilk or donor milk and undiluted drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicines.

***Other liquids or foods include commercial formula, water/glucose water, evaporated milks, goat’s milk, and traditional drinks such as sweetened and flavored waters, teas and infusions, and cereals and thickeners.