

**Medway Infant Feeding Strategy 2018**

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## **Executive Summary**

Giving children the best start in life goes hand in hand with ensuring we meet their nutritional needs. The first 6 months of a baby's life are particularly important when it comes to feeding. Positive infant feeding means:

- Encouraging and supporting women to breastfeed
- Supporting parents who choose to formula feed to do so responsively
- Creating breastfeeding friendly places
- Infants being introduced to solid foods after 6 months
- All eligible families taking part in the Healthy Start vitamin scheme

Positive infant feeding is much more than what we feed our children. It is reliant on parents building close relationships with their babies. This process starts during pregnancy and continues throughout the early year's period and beyond.

All the evidence shows that breastfeeding provides the best nutritional start for babies. Mothers should be encouraged and supported to initiate and continue breastfeeding for the first year and beyond. It provides the greatest health benefit to the infant and the mother. The most recent data suggests that 70% of women initiate breastfeeding, but there is a rapid decline in this rate after the first 48 hours. Less than 40% of women are still breastfeeding by week 6 of their baby's life. Medway is committed to increasing these rates.

Since the previous Medway Infant Feeding Strategy in 2011, considerable progress has been made. This includes:

- The launch and growth of the Medway Breastfeeding Peer Support Network
- Community and acute settings progressing along UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation process
- An increase in skills and knowledge for the health professional workforce
- A number of infant feeding marketing campaigns promoting breastfeeding and infant nutrition messages

This refreshed strategy has the following priority areas:

- Providing support for women wanting to breastfeed
- Workforce development
- Making Every Contact Count
- UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation
- Infant feeding friendly environments
- Marketing campaigns
- Introducing solid foods after 6 months
- Promoting Healthy Start Vitamins

The Medway Infant Feeding Strategy Group will take the lead and facilitate action. Real progress can only be achieved if all partners engage support.

**James Williams, Director of Public Health, Medway Council**

## **Background**

Medway has traditionally had much lower rates of breastfeeding compared to the England average. There is significantly lower rates in areas of higher deprivation. Initiation rates have remained relatively static in Medway moving from 68% in 2011 to 70% in 2017, (compared to the England average of 74% and 83% respectively). The continuation rate, at 6-8 weeks has fallen from 42% in 2011 to 38% of women giving any breast milk at this time in 2017 (compared to 47% in England).

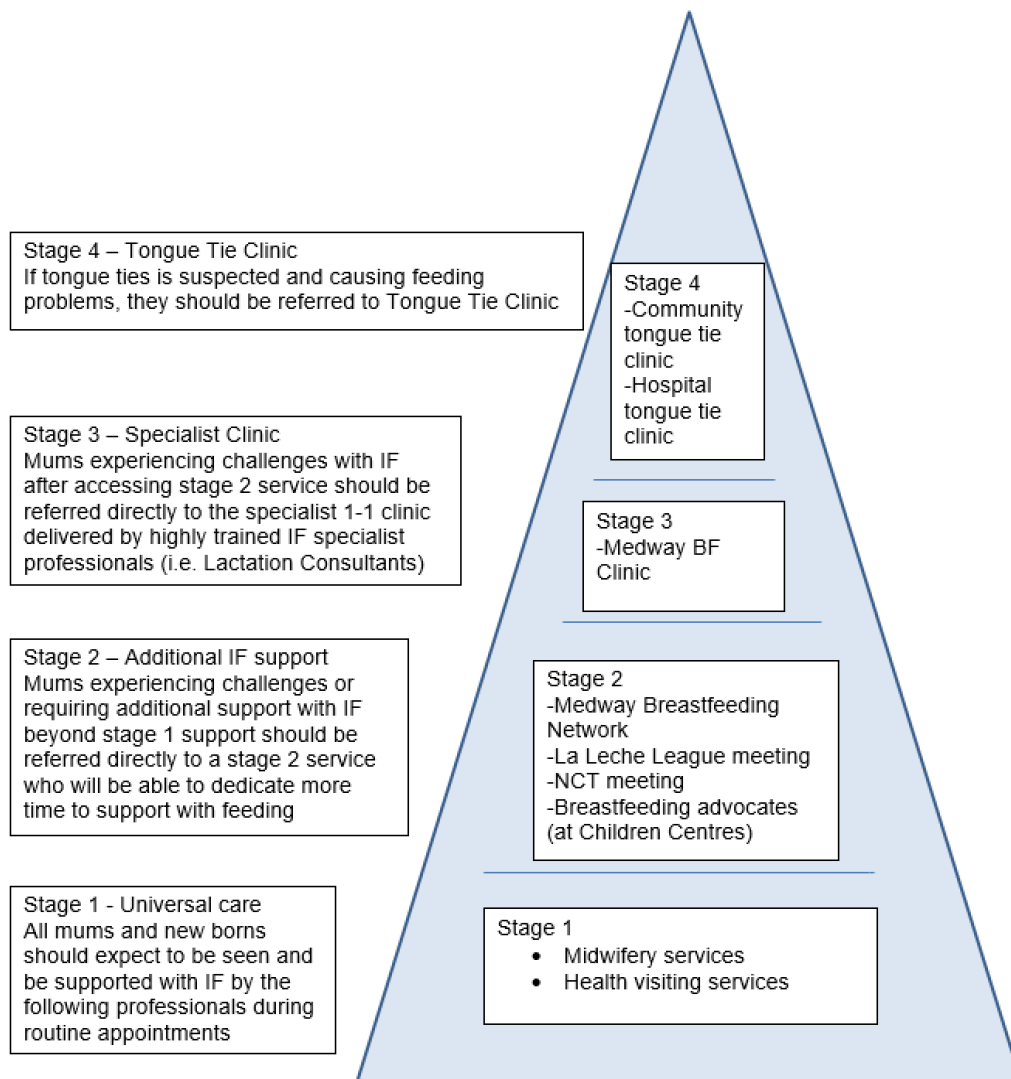
Family and cultural norms can influence mothers' feeding choices. Insights from work carried out in the 'Beside You' campaign launched in 2016, suggests the negative attitude of the community to breastfeeding stem from grandmothers who may not have breastfed their own children. The insights work also suggested that some women felt Medway is not seen as welcoming for those who wish to breastfeed in public.

The 2012 Medway Infant Feeding Strategy identified key objectives for the infant feeding programme. These included full UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) accreditation, development of a peer support network, workforce development, development of an infant feeding pathway and communicating the benefits of breastfeeding to residents.

Considerable progress has been made since this strategy including:

- Full UNICEF UK BFI Accreditation awarded to the Health Visiting and Children's Centre services in February 2016
- Medway Maritime Hospital Maternity Service awarded BFI Stage 2 in March 2017
- Infant Feeding Pathway developed and adopted in 2015 demonstrating the mother's journey from pregnancy through the first year of her child's life and showing the range of breastfeeding and formula feeding support available (fig 1)
- Design and launch of the 'Beside You' multi-media campaign to 'normalise' breastfeeding in Medway
- Development of the Medway Breastfeeding Network with on-going training and supervision of peer supporters commissioned from the NCT
- A joined-up approach with health professionals, children and family hub staff, peer supporters working together with shared responsibility to improve outcomes
- 'Bump to Bright Babies' antenatal session offered to all first time parents, and targeted families, to help them connect with their unborn children building close, warm, loving relationships before and after birth
- Specialist breastfeeding weekly clinic run jointly with the community and infant feeding coordinator and other specialist input
- Community tongue tie service launched in 2016
- La Leche League and NCT breastfeeding counsellors work as volunteers and are integrated into community and hospital services.
- Introducing solid foods sessions offered to all parents with infants aged 4-6 months
- Maternity support workers work in the community to support mothers with feeding
- Community nursery nurses work in health visitor teams to support infant feeding

Figure 1 – Breastfeeding and formula feeding support in Medway



## Why Breastfeeding Matters

Breastfeeding is the biological norm for human babies and impacts considerably on child and adult health outcomes. The evidence base for this is indisputable and wide-ranging, breastfeeding saves the NHS and society money by reducing illness and chronic diseases in both children and mothers over the life course.

### **Reducing illness and chronic disease**

The Lancet Breastfeeding Series demonstrated the positive effects of breastfeeding and the lifelong negative impacts of artificial feeding in both high and low income settings.

Infants who are not breastfed, or partially breastfed, have increased risks of:

- lower respiratory infections
- gastroenteritis
- necrotising enterocolitis
- obesity
- sudden infant death syndrome
- tooth decay and dental malocclusion

The impact of breastfeeding on women's health is less well known by the public. There is

evidence that those who do not breastfeed have:

- An increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer,
- Type 2 diabetes and some inflammatory diseases
- An increase in the incidence of hip fractures, low bone density, osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis
- Less likely to regain their pre-pregnancy weight

Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are currently responsible for 70% of deaths worldwide, primarily cardiovascular disease, cancers, respiratory diseases and diabetes. Healthy gut flora or microbiome is achieved through prolonged breastfeeding. This helps protect babies from developing NCDs later in life. There is also evidence the epigenetic profile affects gene expression and helps to protect against inflammatory processes. Therefore, the way a baby is fed is likely to have an impact on his/her life-long health.

### **Cost effectiveness**

Breastfeeding saves the NHS money as well as saving lives. Evidence suggests if 45% of babies were exclusively breastfed for four months, and 75% of babies in neonatal units were breastfed at discharge, each year there would be:

- 3,285 fewer babies hospitalised with gastroenteritis and 10,637 fewer GP consultations, saving more than £3.6 million
- 5,916 fewer babies hospitalised with respiratory illnesses, and 22,248 fewer GP consultations saving around £6.7 million
- 21,045 fewer ear infection GP visits, saving £750,000
- 361 fewer cases of the potentially fatal disease NEC, saving more than £6 million

### **Insights**

Best Beginnings was commissioned in 2016 to set up a multi-media campaign to normalise breastfeeding in the community. It conducted background research to discover the issues facing mothers in Medway. Based on the findings set up a website 'Beside You', which was launched on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The research provided some valuable qualitative data on the attitudes and experiences of Medway mothers. This insight has informed the development of this strategy.

What Medway mothers said in the research about breastfeeding:

- *"I know the health benefits to breastfeeding and that spurs me on to continue on the difficult days".*
- *"I knew I wanted to do it but wasn't told how difficult it would be. If I had been pre-warned about how difficult it would be I would have been prepared".*
- *"It needs to be explained better, what the reality is going to be, it is going to hurt, the option of combining. Just knowing the facts would help a lot."*
- *"Everyone reaches that point when they want to give up. it is a lonely job as you are the only one who can do it".*
- *"If your child couldn't walk straight away, you wouldn't rush out and buy them a wheelchair, you'd look for solutions, breastfeeding is hard at first, but with help you can get through it"*

## Medway Infant Feeding Strategy 2018 Priorities

This strategy aims to develop the following priorities:

- A year on year increase in breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates, aiming for a 1% uplift per year
- 80% of babies discharged from the neonatal unit receive some breast milk
- All parents are supported to build close relationships with their babies
- Parents are satisfied with the support they receive and able to follow their chosen method of infant feeding
- Breastfeeding is an achievable option for all families, but parents who choose to formula feed are supported to do so responsively
- Medway as a place becomes a more infant feeding friendly environment
- Solid food is offered to infants after 6 months of age, with continued breastfeeding for the first year and beyond
- Increased uptake of Healthy Start vitamins from 2017 baseline

In order to achieve these ambitious outcomes, all stakeholders will need to contribute to a wide range of actions. The Infant Feeding Strategy Group will lead this work, but will need to draw on a number of additional local public, private and voluntary sector partners for support. The key actions will focus on the following areas:

<b>Breast feeding support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer support</li> <li>• Specialist support</li> </ul>	<b>Workforce development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthcare professionals</li> <li>• Other front line staff</li> </ul>
<b>BFI accreditation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternity and neonatal service</li> <li>• Community</li> </ul>	<b>Making Every Contact Count</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternity and Health Visiting staff</li> <li>• All other perinatal contacts</li> </ul>
<b>Infant feeding friendly environments</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health settings</li> <li>• Workplaces</li> <li>• Community settings</li> </ul>	<b>Campaigns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beside You</li> <li>• Grow my brain</li> <li>• Start 4 Life</li> </ul>
<b>Introducing solid foods</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce training</li> <li>• Resident education and support</li> </ul>	<b>Healthy Start Vitamins</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing availability</li> <li>• Driving uptake</li> </ul>

The Infant Feeding Strategy group will produce an annual action plan to deliver against these priorities. Medway Council Public Health department will coordinate the group, with the following partner organisations playing leading roles:

- Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
- Medway Council
- Medway Foundation Trust
- Medway Community Healthcare CiC
- La Leche League

Table 1 highlights some priority actions for 2018/19.



## 2018/19 Infant Feeding Priority Actions

Priority Area	Actions	Outcomes	Lead Partner(s)	Delivery date
Breastfeeding Support	Tongue tie venue			
Breastfeeding Support	Peer support network growth			
Workforce development	GP and practise staff training			
Workforce development	Children and family hubs			
Workforce development	Clinical skills refresh			
BFI accreditation	Midwifery			
BFI accreditation	Neonatal			
BFI accreditation	Health visiting			
Making Every Contact Count	Achieve 95% continuation rate coverage			
Infant feeding friendly environments	Workplace health champions			
Infant feeding friendly environments	Community venues beside you			
Campaigns	Grow my brain – develop a multi-channel campaign informing expectant and new parents how they can build greater attachment with their babies, encouraging interaction and contact with their bumps on new born babies	-Improvement in BFI audit for brain development question -Improved attachment between parent and infant -large media engagement -increased BF rates	<b>MFT</b> Medway Council MCH MCCG Local media	March 2019
Campaigns	Beside You			

Introducing solid foods	Training professionals			
Healthy start vitamins	Review of best practise			