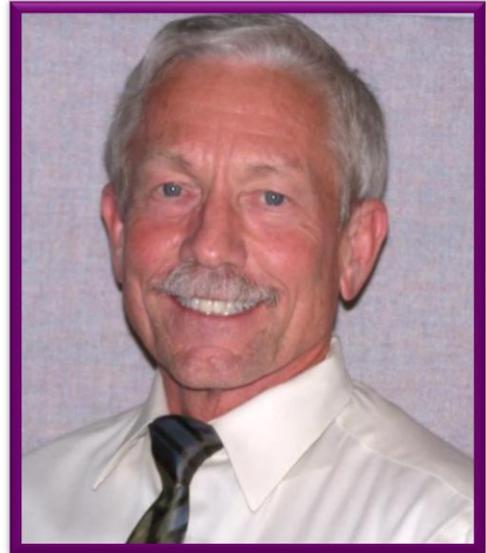


To *Your* HEALTH *Fresno County*

Bringing you public health issues and ways to improve personal, family, neighborhood and community health



The Breastfeeding Choice – A Public Health Issue

July 25, 2014

In previous letters, I discussed the issue of chronic illnesses and their impact on the health of Fresno County. The impact is staggering and costly. Making healthy choices is one of many things that can be done to reduce the risk of chronic illness and premature death. This is equally true for babies.

Those who are planning to have a baby face many important decisions including how to feed your baby. Formula feeding has been marketed as the modern and convenient way to feed your baby with benefits similar to breastfeeding. However, formula fed infants, and those infants not exclusively breastfed, do not receive the optimum infant nutrition and the health protections provided by antibodies which are only found in breast milk.¹

Health benefits for babies which result from breastfeeding include better protection from diarrhea, ear infections, respiratory infections, gastrointestinal illnesses, asthma, sudden infant death syndrome, and urinary tract infections. Children breastfed as infants have higher IQ scores and better school performance, enhanced visual, motor, and oral development, reduced risk of childhood obesity and diabetes, reduced childhood cancers, reduced chronic illnesses, and decreased incidence and severity of allergies. Health benefits also extend to mothers who breastfeed. Breastfeeding mothers are at reduced risk for postpartum hemorrhage, postpartum depression, breast, ovarian, and uterine cancers, and osteoporosis.² Even more importantly, the increased maternal-child bonding and attachment that results from breastfeeding fosters a healthy foundation for relationships and families which so very critical to our community's health.¹

This considerable list of individual and public health benefits resulted in a 2012 recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics for exclusive breastfeeding of infants for the first 6 months and continued breastfeeding, along with complimentary foods, for at least the one full year.³

In Fresno County in 2012, less than half of all newborns leaving the hospital were being exclusively breastfed and even fewer were being exclusively breastfed one week later.⁴ What can be done to improve the rates for exclusive breastfeeding for babies in Fresno County?

As individuals and families, we can learn more about:

1. The Benefits of Breastfeeding: [Office of Women's Health Breastfeeding](#)
2. Importance of Breastfeeding:
 - [American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement on Breastfeeding](#)
 - [Babies First – Fresno County Breastfeeding Resources](#)
 - [California Breastfeeding Laws](#)

Making the decision to breastfeed is the healthy choice and is not without its challenges. Medical providers and policies at delivery hospitals play a vital role in supporting a new mother's decision to breastfeed and her ability to be successful in breastfeeding her baby.¹ In Fresno County, three delivery hospitals are working with the FCDPH to implement the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative's [10 Steps for Successful Breastfeeding](#) policies and practices in their delivery hospitals.

As health care providers, we can play a vital role in supporting a new mother's decision to breastfeed and her ability to be successful in breastfeeding her baby.

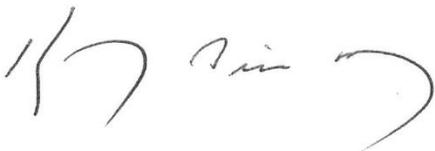
As employers, we can provide encouragement as well as the time and space for mothers to pump or breastfeed as required under state legislation Lactation Accommodation for all California employees. California [Public California Civil Code 43.3](#), the "Right to Breastfeed," protects a mother's right to breastfeed her child in any location, public or private, except the private home or residence of another, where the mother and child are otherwise authorized to be present.

As a community, we can increase our awareness of the importance of breastfeeding as a public health issue. To assist with raising awareness on this issue, the Fresno County Babies First Breastfeeding Task Force invites the community to participate in its 9th Annual Breastfeeding Awareness Walk and Celebration, "First Step to a Healthy Life" event on August 2, 2014 at Woodward Park. The two mile walk will conclude with refreshments, raffle, entertainment, and informational booths. The "First Step to a Healthy Life" event is an opportunity for the community's mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, families, employers, and agencies to support the effort to educate others that breastfeeding is the "First Step to a Healthy Life". You can pre-register to participate in the event by visiting: [Babies First Fresno](#).

Successful breastfeeding confers a lifetime of benefits for the mother, child, families, and our community.

I would like to hear from you. What choices are you making to improve the health of your family and community? Who do you know that is a Champion for Health? Email me at ToYourHealth@co.fresno.ca.us.

Here's to your health!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Bird", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Ken Bird, Fresno County Interim Health Officer

¹ US. Department of Health and Human Services, The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human services, Office of the Surgeon General;2011.

² Ip S, Chung M, Raman G, et al. Breastfeeding and maternal and infant health outcomes in developed countries. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2007. www.ahrq.gov/clinic/tp/brfouttp.htm.

³ American Academy of Pediatrics, *Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk*. SECTION ON BREASTFEEDING, Elk Grove Village, IL. American Academy of pediatrics 2012

⁴ California Department of Public Health, Center for Family Health, Genetic Disease Screening Program, Newborn Screening Data, 2012. www.cdph.ca.gov/data/statistics/Pages/BreastfeedingStatistics.aspx