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EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT - PERINATAL AND CHILD HEALTH SURVEY STRATEGIES - YORK REGION INFANT FEEDING STUDY 2002-2003

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, May 11, 2004, from the Commissioner of Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee and Regional Council receive for information the final results of the York Region Infant Feeding Study 2002–2003, funded through the Early Child Development Perinatal and Child Health Survey Strategies initiative.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee and Regional Council regarding the final results of the York Region Infant Feeding Study conducted between 2002 and 2003. This report will provide a brief description of the study and highlight the significant findings.

3. BACKGROUND

In March 2002, the Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee and Regional Council authorized the receipt and expenditure of one-time 100% provincial funding for the Perinatal and Child Health Survey Strategies. The Infant Feeding Study, one of the strategies funded, provided the means to gather and evaluate representative baseline data of infant feeding practices at six weeks and six months postpartum. The study was developed in collaboration with seven other health units from primarily south central Ontario.

Resident York Region mothers who gave birth either in local hospitals or in hospitals outside York Region, and who consented, were able to participate in the survey once inclusion criteria were met. The final sample size was 500 mothers for the six-week survey and 440 mothers for the subsequent six-month survey.

The identification of key influences on infant feeding outcomes is a vital first step in the development of evidence-based programs to better meet the needs of residents and improve the health of infants and mothers. The study enabled the York Region Health Services Department to identify and analyze potential influences on breastfeeding initiation, duration, exclusivity and maternal satisfaction. Data was also collected and

analyzed regarding formula feeding practices, infant nutrition, postpartum depression, workplace supports and early infant dental practices.

As a Public Health Unit, we have the obligation to promote, protect and support breastfeeding in York Region. According to the *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic and Neonatal Nursing* (2000), infant health outcomes as a result of breastfeeding may include: fewer infections, ear infections, asthma, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and Type 1 Diabetes. Maternal health outcomes as a result of breastfeeding may include: reduced post partum bleeding; quicker post natal weight loss; and reduced incidence of pre menopausal ovarian and breast cancers.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The breastfeeding initiation rate for York Region was 94%. Fifty-one percent continued until six months postpartum. Only 13% of infants at six months had never received formula. The majority had received solid foods by four months of age, thus no infants were exclusively breastfed until six months. At six months, 93% of all mothers who breastfed were satisfied with their experience.

4.1 Predictors of Outcomes

Key predictors of breastfeeding outcomes (initiation, duration, exclusivity and satisfaction) in York Region include variables related to social determinants, preconception planning, pre and postnatal supports as well as exposure to infant formula. These are discussed in this section.

4.1.1 Social Determinants

Better breastfeeding outcomes were achieved by mothers who were better educated, had higher incomes, and who had previous children.

4.1.2 Preconception Planning

Mothers who reported thinking about feeding methods before pregnancy (71% of sample) reported fewer breastfeeding problems, were more likely to be satisfied with their breastfeeding experience at six weeks postpartum and were more likely to be breastfeeding at six months postpartum.

4.1.3 Prenatal and Postnatal Supports

Over 90% of the mothers who attended prenatal classes were first time mothers. The study demonstrated an unanticipated finding: mothers who attended prenatal classes had a shorter duration of breastfeeding. The survey reported that breastfeeding clinics and peer support groups were most likely to be reported as very helpful sources of support for breastfeeding.

4.1.4 Formula Exposure

Mothers who did not use formula were more likely to be breastfeeding at six months. This relationship, and the health benefits of exclusive breastfeeding until six months, are

reflected in recommendations on duration of exclusive breastfeeding from the World Health Organization (2002).

4.2 Strategies to Address Outcomes

The survey indicates that strategies need to be directed at improving breastfeeding outcomes with respect to duration and exclusivity and include the following:

- Regular visits to Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program sites, Ontario Early Years Centres, shelters and high schools.
- Increasing clinic hours and locations to under-serviced areas.
- Development of peer support groups.
- Development and access to resources available in multiple languages.
- Delivery of a media campaign to increase awareness of the importance of breastfeeding.
- Developing school curriculum to provide breastfeeding messaging.
- Revision of prenatal class curriculum.
- Ongoing education and resource development for Child Birth Educators to encourage informed infant feeding decisions and supportive approaches to mothers who are not breastfeeding.
- Staff education to ensure consistency and implementation of best practice.
- Work with partners to develop and implement community Breastfeeding Friendly Initiatives.

The study has provided representative baseline data. Its utility will end at this point unless additional funding can be found to support the strategies outlined.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The York Region Infant Feeding Study supports the goals of Quality Communities for a Diverse Population; Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture; and Responding to the Needs of our Residents as detailed in the Vision 2026 document.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Infant Feeding Survey was 100% provincially funded through the Early Child Development Initiatives. The total cost of the survey was \$57,374 (in 2002 and 2003) and was included under the Perinatal Survey Strategies initiative budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The data generated from this study is representative of, and specific to, York Region families. Copies of the study will be available at Health Services Department offices and will be accessible through the York Region website, www.region.york.on.ca. To increase public access to the report, libraries will be requested to hold copies for reference purposes. Health Services staff are also available to present this information to local municipal councils and interested local groups on request.

7. CONCLUSION

The intent of the Infant Feeding Study was to gather representative baseline data on infant feeding practices and to identify significant influences on breastfeeding outcomes in York Region. Next steps include the following:

- Dissemination of study findings.
- Development of program strategies to support survey findings and address identified needs.
- Collaboration and examination of study findings with study partners (seven health units).
- Lobbying for future funding in order to implement identified strategies and conduct a follow-up survey.

The survey indicates that the York Region Health Services Department is just meeting the *Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines (1997)* requirement of 50% of infants' breastfeeding up to six months by 2010. However, the rate of growth and range of diversity of York Region residents requires that this program be re-assessed periodically to ensure that provincial requirements and resident needs continue to be met.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.