



Infant feeding practices of mothers attending a rural community health immunisation clinic with infants aged between six and eight months



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The Eurobodalla Child and Family Health Service (CAFHS) is committed to ensuring implementation of the NSW Health *Breastfeeding in NSW: Promotion, Protection and Support* policy directive. An obstacle in progressing implementation is that at a local level, there is a lack of routine monitoring and documentation of breastfeeding rates and other infant feeding practices. The aim of this study was to collect local data on breastfeeding initiation, duration and exclusivity as well as reasons for stopping breastfeeding, giving expressed breast milk, deciding to infant formula feed, infant formula choice and factors associated the introduction of complementary solid foods and the timing of the introduction of water and fruit juice.

Mothers (54) with infants aged between six and eight months of age attending the local community health centre immunisation clinic for their child's six month immunisation were asked to complete a survey comprised of 28 questions related to their infant's feeding practices.

The participation rate was 89%, ages of participants ranged from 19 to 43 years. 24 participants were Health Care Card (HCC) recipients. Forty-seven (87%) mothers initiated breastfeeding; the average duration of exclusive breastfeeding was 15 weeks; seven (13%) infants were exclusively breastfed until 26 weeks of age. Thirty-one (54%) infants were still receiving some breast milk at 26 weeks of age. The main reason for loss of breastfeeding exclusivity was the introduction of infant formula 33% (18). HCC holders were 22% less likely to have ever breastfed. Mothers who knew the definition of exclusive breastfeeding were 64% more likely to have ever breastfed. Mothers who had higher socioeconomic status and knowledge about recommended infant feeding practices were more likely to initiate breastfeeding, still be breastfeeding at 26 weeks and not use formula. Forty-one (76%) infants were introduced to complementary solid foods before the recommended 26 weeks. The average age of introduction of complementary solid foods was 22 weeks.

Although the majority of mothers were aware of the definition of exclusive breastfeeding few followed the recommended guidelines related to infant feeding. The main reason for loss of exclusivity of breastfeeding was the introduction of formula feeds. The main reason for the early introduction of complementary solid food were related to maternal interpretation of infant cues and behaviour.

Accurate monitoring of infant feeding practices is essential to ensure health service policy and plans reflect both state and national health priorities. The findings from this study will enable the Eurobodalla C&FHS to have a starting point to review the outcomes of any implemented practice changes resulting from the local implementation of the NSW Health Breastfeeding Policy.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

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