

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has released a new evidence report on breastfeeding and health outcomes. The report found evidence that breastfeeding decreases infants' and mothers' risk of having many short-term and chronic diseases.

### **For Babies**

There is good evidence that breastfeeding reduced infants' risk of ear infections by up to 50 percent, serious lower respiratory tract infections by 72 percent, and a skin rash similar to eczema by 42 percent. Children with a family history of asthma who had been breastfed were 40 percent less likely to have asthma, and children who were not prone to asthma had a 27 percent reduced risk compared to those children who were not breastfed. The risk of developing type 1 diabetes was reduced by about 20 percent. These benefits were seen in infants who were breastfed for three or more months. Breastfeeding also reduced the risk of type 2 diabetes by 39 percent compared to those who were not breastfed.

The report also found that breastfeeding was associated with fewer episodes of diarrhea during infancy, decreased incidence of childhood leukemia, and decreased deaths from sudden infant death syndrome. The report found no clear relationship between breastfeeding and improvement in IQ. In premature infants, breastfeeding decreased the occurrence of necrotizing enterocolitis, a serious gastrointestinal infection that often results in death.

### **For Moms**

For health outcomes in mothers, there is good evidence that women who breastfed their infants had up to a 12 percent reduced risk of type 2 diabetes for each year they breastfed. Breastfeeding decreased the risk of ovarian cancer by up to 21 percent. Breastfeeding also decreased the risk of breast cancer by up to 28 percent in those whose lifetime duration of breastfeeding was 12 months or longer. Women who did not breastfeed their infants were more likely to have postpartum depression, but unmeasured factors—such as depression that was undiagnosed prior to giving birth—may have increased the rate of depression seen in this group. Breastfeeding did not increase the risk of fractures due to osteoporosis. The effect of breastfeeding on a woman's weight could not be determined based on the available studies.

The report was nominated and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health and prepared by Stanley Ip, M.D., Joseph Lau, M.D., and colleagues at AHRQ's Tufts-New England Medical Center Evidence-based Practice Center in Boston, Massachusetts. AHRQ's EPCs develop evidence reports and technology assessments on topics relevant to clinical, social science/behavioral, economic, and other health care organization and delivery issues—specifically those that are common, expensive, and/or significant for the Medicare and Medicaid populations.