



LA LECHE LEAGUE NEW ZEALAND PRESS RELEASE 13 APRIL 2010

REPORT REAFFIRMS - BREASTFEEDING SAVES LIVES

Latest research suggesting over 900 babies would be saved each year if 90 per cent of US women breastfed their babies highlights the need for more support for breastfeeding mothers worldwide, according to La Leche League New Zealand.

The results, published online in the journal *Pediatrics**, say if mothers in the US followed the global recommendation to breastfeed exclusively for six months, billions of dollars would be saved in healthcare costs for treating diseases such as gastroenteritis, ear infections, asthma and juvenile diabetes.

Breastfeeding rates in New Zealand are significantly higher than in the US, but are still much lower than is recommended. While there are as yet no equivalent NZ calculations of mortality rates and healthcare costs resulting from suboptimal infant feeding, it is well known that breastfed babies get sick less often and less severely and are less likely to be hospitalised than their artificially fed counterparts.

“Almost certainly there will also be avoidable infant deaths as a consequence of sub-optimal feeding. Even if the mortality rate for NZ was only half that for the US, that would still equate to around seven NZ babies losing their lives each year who would have lived had they been optimally breastfed,” says outgoing LLLNZ Director Barbara Sturmfels.

LLLNZ believes the report reinforces the need for continued government and community commitment to increasing breastfeeding rates, through a diversity of programmes that support breastfeeding women and educate the public about the benefits of breastfeeding to society as a whole. “Legislative changes to improve conditions for breastfeeding mothers in the paid workforce, a public advertising campaign to promote breastfeeding in public, and support for the implementation of UNICEF’s Baby Friendly Initiative in New Zealand are some of the ways that the government is seeking improvements in breastfeeding rates through institutional and societal change.”

“New Zealand’s Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative is successfully helping change hospital practices but once mothers are caring for their babies at home they have less access to timely help with breastfeeding. This leads to many New Zealand women giving up breastfeeding well before they or their babies are ready. With appropriate information and support to overcome difficulties and obstacles most would be able to continue. Increased breastfeeding rates in New Zealand would result in reductions in serious illnesses and hospital admissions saving many health dollars as illustrated in the US study,” says Ms Sturmfels.

“Informed and skilful mother-to-mother support can really make a difference,” says Ms Sturfels: “A new mum needs the love and support of her partner and family. She also needs to know where to go for help or guidance if difficulties arise when breastfeeding. That’s where organisations like La Leche League come in.”

“There are around 50 La Leche League Groups across New Zealand with over 150 accredited Leaders helping thousands of breastfeeding women annually. Mothers and pregnant women can contact LLL Leaders at any time for a helpful listening ear and a wealth of useful information and tips, as well as attend group meetings to learn about breastfeeding in the company of other mothers. Although breastfeeding is a very personal and individual experience for each mother and baby, this latest research highlights the enormous health benefits to us all. Indeed breastfeeding is a worldwide public health issue.” ENDS

* *"The Burden of Suboptimal Breastfeeding in the United States: A Pediatric Cost Analysis"* by Melissa Bartick MD MSc and Arnold Reinhold MBA, published online in *Pediatrics* on 5 April 2010 at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/peds.2009-1616v1>

La Leche League is an international non-governmental not-for-profit non-sectarian organisation whose mission is to help mothers breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information and education; and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother. There are around 50 groups across New Zealand with over 150 accredited Leaders supporting thousands of women every year. www.lalecheleague.org.nz

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