



MORE SUPPORT NEEDED FOR BREASTFEEDING MUMS

Thousands of New Zealand mums are not breastfeeding because they don't get enough help, according to the country's leading breastfeeding support group.

La Leche League New Zealand, a mother-to-mother support organisation, says more emphasis needs to be placed on helping mums breastfeed their babies after discharge from hospital.

“Our maternity services are getting better and better at implementing comprehensive breastfeeding policies, but more has to be done to encourage and help mothers when they get home. We cannot hope for breastfeeding to become the norm if we do not give mothers the ongoing help they need,” says LLLNZ spokesperson Lisa Manning.

“La Leche League New Zealand has 150 accredited Leaders throughout the country but many pregnant women haven't heard of us. We need hospitals and birthing centres to routinely refer women to available breastfeeding support groups if we are to increase breastfeeding rates,” she adds.

The appeal comes ahead of World Breastfeeding Week at the start of next month. This year's theme celebrates the 20th anniversary of UNICEF's Innocenti Declaration which called for the implementation of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. The Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life are important aspects of the Baby Friendly Initiative. New Zealand has over 90 percent (72 out of 78) of its maternity facilities accredited as Baby Friendly, which equates to nearly 90 percent of New Zealand births occurring in accredited facilities.¹

As a result exclusive breastfeeding rates have increased significantly with nearly 90 percent¹ of New Zealand babies being exclusively breastfed on discharge from a Baby Friendly accredited facility. However this soon falls to 51.5 percent of all babies at six weeks, 39 percent at three months, and 14 percent at six months (2007 data)².

Each year La Leche League New Zealand makes 18,000 contacts with mothers through its network of mother-to-mother support groups and its telephone helpline. Over 6,000 more contacts each year are made by Leaders with health professionals and members of the public. La Leche League New Zealand liaises with government agencies and has input into policy and document reviews voicing the needs of breastfeeding women.

Recent government campaigns have raised awareness of the importance of breastfeeding, and statistics show that the vast majority of women intend to breastfeed. But once at home with their new babies, mothers are often without adequate support that reinforces good strategies or provides information to avoid breastfeeding problems.

“Widespread promotion of breastfeeding without timely and sufficient support leads to breastfeeding ending prematurely and to upset and disillusioned mothers, who may take their anger out on breastfeeding advocates,” Lisa says.

La Leche League urges all midwives, well child nurses, practice nurses, GPs, family members and friends to encourage pregnant and breastfeeding women to make contact with a mother to mother breastfeeding support group. There are 55 La Leche League Groups throughout New Zealand and many community health services (for example that work with Maori, Pacific, rural and young parents) are establishing mother to mother breastfeeding support groups through La Leche League’s Breastfeeding Peer Counsellor Programme. La Leche League believes that all mothers are entitled to information and support so they can achieve satisfactory experiences of breastfeeding their babies.

La Leche League is an international non-governmental not-for-profit non-sectarian organisation whose mission is to help mothers to 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 55 groups across New Zealand with 150 accredited Leaders supporting thousands of women every year. www.lalecheleague.org.nz

References:

1. NZBA, July 2010
2. National Breastfeeding Advisory Committee, *National Strategic Plan of Action for Breastfeeding 2008-2012*, Ministry of Health, March 2009; p27.

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