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Breastfeeding Summit Launches County-Wide Project to Increase Breastfeeding Rates

LOS ANGELES, October 24, 2012. Exclusive breastfeeding is one of the most effective preventative health measures for infants and mothers, yet more than half of the babies born in LA County are given formula in the first few days of life in the hospital and by 12 months, only 20% are breastfeeding at all. To help reverse these trends, the Los Angeles Breastfeeding Summit was held today and BreastfeedLA and the Department of Public Health jointly announced a project to significantly improve breastfeeding rates in hospitals. 19 hospitals have been selected to participate in the BEST Hospital Breastfeeding Project, a county-wide initiative to increase the number of hospitals implementing a proven model for maternity services that better supports a new mother's choice to breastfeed.

"Although some breastfeeding is better than none, the best results are achieved when breastfeeding is done exclusively and for a longer duration," said Jonathan Fielding, MD, director of the Department of Public Health of the County of Los Angeles and the keynote presenter at the LA Breastfeeding Summit. "The breastfeeding project will provide hospitals with the assistance needed to achieve 'Baby-Friendly' status, resulting in greater breastfeeding rates and health benefits for both infants and their mothers throughout life." The BEST Project has been made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

The 19 hospitals deliver more than 39,000 babies each year, out of the 134,000 born LA County. These hospitals will work together with technical assistance provided by BreastfeedLA to achieve the "Baby-Friendly" designation. Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative is a joint project of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF. The goal of the initiative is to recognize



hospitals and maternity centers that demonstrate their commitment to providing a positive environment for breastfeeding mothers by fulfilling the rigorous standards outlined in the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*, www.babyfriendlyusa.org. Hospitals that follow these standards are designated as a Baby-Friendly hospital. Currently only 13 of the 58 LA County birthing hospitals are designated as “Baby-Friendly”.

The following hospitals have been selected to participate in this project, which will specifically focus on helping these hospitals achieve the Baby-Friendly designation: Bellflower Medical Center, Centinela Hospital Medical Center, East Los Angeles Doctors Hospital, Greater El Monte Community Hospital, Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center, memorial Hospital of Gardena, Monterey Park Hospital, Northridge Hospital Medical Center, Pacifica Hospital of the Valley, Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center, Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center Torrance, Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center San Pedro, Providence St Joseph Medical Center, San Gabriel Valley Medical Center, Torrance Memorial Medical Center and Whittier Hospital Medical Center. Additionally, the following Baby-Friendly hospitals will participate in this project to maintain their designation: Harbor UCLA Medical Center, LAC+USC Medical Center and ValleyCare Olive View UCLA Medical Center.

Breastfeeding exclusively and extensively is a strong foundation for the health of both infants and their mothers. For infants, it decreases the incidence and severity of many infectious diseases, reduces infant mortality, and optimally supports neurodevelopment. It also decreases infants’ risk of becoming obese later in childhood. For mothers, breastfeeding decreases the risks of breast and ovarian cancer, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and cardiovascular disease.

“We know that Baby-Friendly hospitals provide the best care to help mothers and babies succeed at breastfeeding, yet fewer than 20% of babies in LA County are born in these facilities,” said Karen Peters, executive director of BreastfeedLA. “We need to help hospitals improve their maternity care to better support breastfeeding.



This project takes steps to do that, and it offers real solutions to improve the health of mothers and babies.”

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