

# Reducing Obesity from the Start: California Hospitals Must Increase Exclusive Breastfeeding Rates

## A Report on California Breastfeeding and Hospital Performance

Produced by the California WIC Association and the UC Davis Human Lactation Center

### VENTURA COUNTY

#### CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT: AN URGENT HEALTH CRISIS IN CALIFORNIA.

- More than 400,000 children under six years old are overweight, and this number continues to increase.<sup>1</sup>
- Interventions typically target school-age children, but prevention should start much earlier, as early as the day the child is born.
- Breast milk provides infants with all the nutrients they need and elements that promote growth and a healthy immune system.<sup>2</sup> Breastfeeding is also recognized as the first step in the battle against childhood overweight.<sup>3</sup>

#### Exclusive Breastfeeding:

*The infant receives only breast milk, no other food or fluid.*

#### BREASTFEEDING: THE FIRST STEP IN PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT.

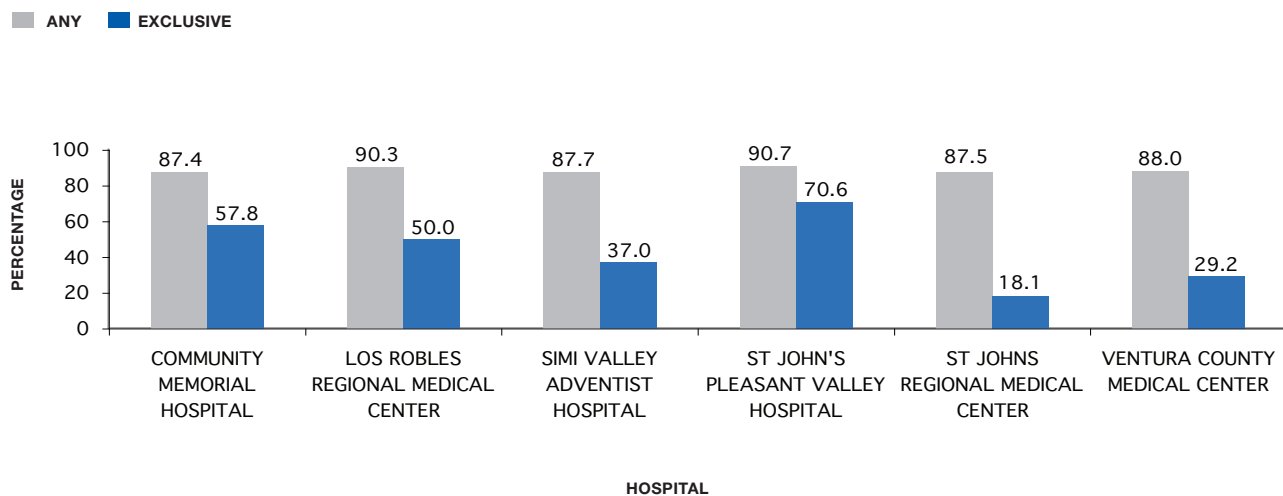
- More than 83 percent of California mothers choose to breastfeed their infants in the hospital. Unfortunately, only 40.5 percent of these infants are breastfed exclusively—that is, breast milk is their only food.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months.<sup>4</sup> Mothers who breastfeed exclusively are likely to breastfeed for a longer time. Exclusive breastfeeding offers the best protection against overweight.<sup>3</sup>

#### HOSPITAL POLICES HAVE AN ENORMOUS IMPACT ON THE CHOICE A MOTHER MAKES ABOUT FEEDING HER INFANT.<sup>5,6</sup>

- Practices such as separating mothers from their babies, delaying the first feeding, and giving formula to every mother (even those who have told the hospital that they want to breastfeed) can prevent mothers from carrying out their decision to breastfeed.

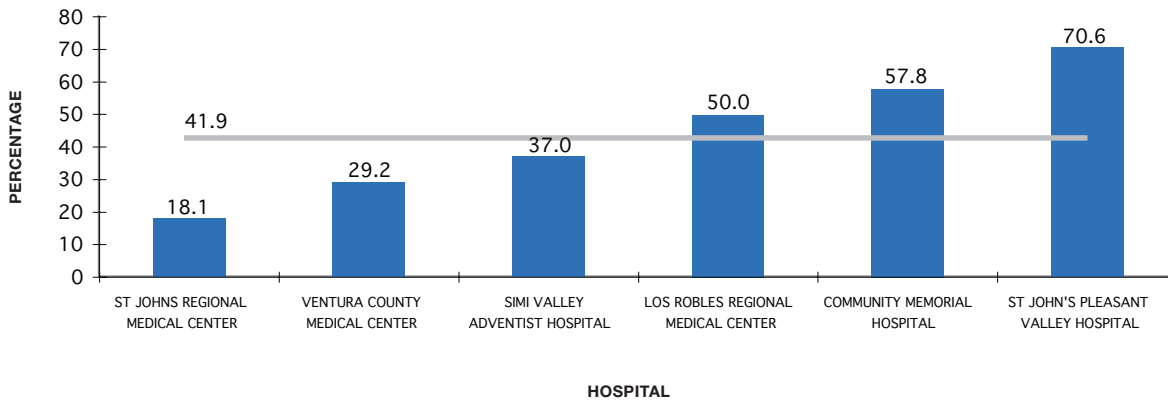
The UC Davis Human Lactation Center used data from the California Department of Health Services Genetic Disease Branch to create the following charts showing in-hospital breastfeeding rates.

#### Ventura County In-Hospital Breastfeeding Rates, 2004



## Ventura County In-Hospital *Exclusive* Breastfeeding Rates, Hospital and County, 2004

■ HOSPITAL RATES    — COUNTY AVERAGE



### Ventura County Breastfeeding and Hospital Performance

- County average breastfeeding rates:  
Any – 88.2%    Exclusive – 41.9%
- Ranked 36th in the state for exclusive breastfeeding

### Exclusive Breastfeeding by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	% Exclusive	State Average
African-American	32.1	30.5
Asian	34.9	40.0
Hispanic	31.6	29.0
Multi-Race/Other	52.4	51.3
White	59.3	61.8
Missing	42.9	44.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>40.5</b>

For information on ways to eliminate barriers to breastfeeding, refer to the Model Hospital Policy Recommendations, June 2005 Toolkit: [www.mch.dhs.ca.gov/programs/bfp/toolkit/default.htm](http://www.mch.dhs.ca.gov/programs/bfp/toolkit/default.htm)

#### REFERENCES

1. Inkelas M, et al. The health of young children in California: Findings from the 2001 California Health Interview Survey, Los Angeles and Sacramento: UCLA Center for Health Policy.
2. Heinig MJ. Host defense benefits of breastfeeding for the infant. Effect of breastfeeding duration and exclusivity. *Ped Clin North Am* 2001; 48:105-123.
3. Owen CG, et al. Effect on infant feeding on the risk of obesity across the life course: A quantitative review of published evidence. *Pediatrics* 2005; 115:1367-1377.
4. Gartner LM, et al. American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Breastfeeding. Breastfeeding and the use of human milk. *Pediatrics* 2005 Feb; 115(2):496-506.
5. Gagnon AJ, et al. In-hospital formula supplementation of healthy breastfeeding newborns. *J Hum Lact* 2005; 21:397-405.
6. DiGirolamo AM, et al. Maternity care practices: Implications for breastfeeding. *Birth* 2001; 28:94-100.



1107 9th Street  
Suite 625  
Sacramento, California 95814  
(916) 448-2280  
[www.calwic.org](http://www.calwic.org)

### UC DAVIS

UC Davis Human Lactation Center  
One Shields Avenue  
Davis, California 95616  
(530) 754-5364  
<http://lactation.ucdavis.edu>

This project was made possible by a grant from the Vitamin Cases Consumer Settlement Fund. Created as a result of an antitrust class action, one of the purposes of the Fund is to improve the health and nutrition of California consumers.