

# World *Breastfeeding* Week

## 1-8 August 2007

The signature event for this years' World Breastfeeding Week is truly international as we join women from around the globe to set a Guinness Record for '***The most women in synchronized breastfeeding around the world***'. On Wednesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of August, the Guinness Record will count all women breastfeeding at 10am local time around the world. New Zealand has the privilege of kicking off the event.

Women's Health Action is organising the New Zealand leg of this international "Big Latch On" following successful nationwide attempts in the last two years. (cf [www.women's-health.org.nz](http://www.women's-health.org.nz) ) 'This year is different' says Louise James, Breastfeeding Advocate for Women's Health Action. 'It's a work day so we are encouraging workplaces to get involved as well as the usual early childhood centres, coffee groups, playgroups and birthing facilities. But you don't need a posh venue - a mother at home can all join in and be counted with the world.' The website: gives more details and provides an on line form to register.

Each year the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) sets the theme for Breastfeeding Week. This year the theme highlights the importance of direct skin-to-skin contact between mother and their newborn babies. Placing a newborn baby directly on the mother's bare chest immediately after birth and leaving it there for at least an hour allows the baby to find her way naturally to the breast and start breastfeeding. It's all about allowing the infant's and mother's instinctive behaviours to click in and allow a peaceful and natural start to the breastfeeding relationship. This is step four of the ten steps to successful breastfeeding endorsed by WHO and UNICEF. A leaflet is being developed for distribution to mothers and will be available at every Big Latch On venue.

Skin-to-skin immediately after birth also has significant benefits.

For the baby it

- helps get breastfeeding off to a good start and also
- provides immunity rich colostrum
- regulates her temperature
- calms her and stabilizes breathing which
- reduces stress, distress, pain and crying

And for the mother it:

- increases her love hormone oxytocin
- helps reduce bleeding
- and provides a calm and special time to get to know her new child

Historically the practice of skin-to-skin at birth is universal across every human culture in the world. In the home setting it occurs automatically and requires no special attention. However in hospital and medical settings, it can be overlooked so attention must be given to providing skin-to-skin time in a suitable place. In New Zealand, 'Baby Friendly' hospitals have a mandate to provide skin-to-skin.

Infants born in these hospitals are supported to have skin-to-skin immediately after birth.

Nationally 57 hospitals have been accredited Baby Friendly and the Ministry of Health has called on all maternity facilities to be 'baby friendly' accredited. This requires each facility to have a written breastfeeding policy, to implement the "Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding" and to provide appropriate training for all staff so that the hospital welcomes new life naturally and encourages breastfeeding. The New Zealand Breastfeeding Authority (NZBA) administers the accreditation and audit process. A baby friendly hospital requires skin-to-skin contact within the first half-hour of birth for at least thirty minutes at least 80% of the time. Julie Stufkens, Executive Officer of NZBA says "It is pleasing to see that a number of maternity units, at audit for Baby Friendly accreditation, have achieved this 100%".

As yet the two biggest maternity hospitals in the country are among those that haven't been accredited; National Women's and Middlemore in Auckland. This is a shame because the best efforts of concerned Lactation Consultants and Midwives in these hospitals is often not understood and supported by other staff in these busy environments. They also have large numbers of births and problems with recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

In New Zealand the option to have a home birth is supported and most areas have midwives who are skilled in their craft and attend mothers at home. Jeannette Lazet, spokesperson for Home Birth Aotearoa says that "Obviously a home birth setting is the optimal way to establish these vital first bonding moments". Often a home birth is overlooked in a society that has delegated their trust to health professionals. However there is a growing number of women confident enough in their bodies to birth normally at home with midwifery care. They are more likely to deliver healthy breastfeeding babies.

The best beginning for an infant and mother is an undrugged birth, followed by skin to skin where the baby is placed immediately on the mother's bare chest and both adapt to the new environment without interruption. The best place to facilitate this is at home. Accredited 'Baby Friendly' hospitals support it and all other hospitals in New Zealand are working towards it.

World Breastfeeding Week will finish this year with an international bang – the "Big Latch On". Mothers all around the world will freely breastfeed their children in a variety of settings to remind us all that breastfeeding is the normal way to feed infants.

Contact Louise James  
[louise@womens-health.org.nz](mailto:louise@womens-health.org.nz)  
(09) 520 5295