

# NICU breastfeeding rates

## What are NICU breastfeeding rates?

NICU breastfeeding rates are measures of the amount (exclusive, partial or none) of breastfeeding/breast milk feeding for NICU infants at specific time points:

- Discharge
- 2 and 4 weeks post-discharge
- 3 and 6 months corrected gestational age (CGA)

Since many NICU infants are discharged before achieving full feeds at-breast, it is important to capture both breastfeeding as well as the amount and proportion of feeds that are own mother's milk (OMM).<sup>1</sup>

## Why are NICU breastfeeding rates important?

The success of NICU lactation care is reflected in a unit's breastfeeding rates and the proportion of feeds that are OMM. Continued data collection after discharge allows healthcare professionals to provide ongoing proactive lactation support.<sup>2</sup>

Low exclusive breastfeeding or OMM at discharge and subsequent time points may indicate sub-optimal lactation care during the hospital stay.<sup>3</sup>

## How to implement?

Develop / revise protocols that:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Record breastfeeding /breast milk feeding at:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discharge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 2 and 4 weeks post-discharge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 3 and 6 months CGA</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify and train staff to collect breastfeeding rates and offer lactation support pathways</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support mothers to express early and frequently in order to initiate and build their milk supply (come to volume)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collect qualitative data from mothers regarding their breastfeeding expectations and goals, lactation experiences and barriers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Regularly educate staff on the importance of OMM, best practices to support maternal milk volumes and how optimising maternal milk volumes is key to achieving high breastfeeding rates</li> </ul> |
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## How to audit?

Strategies to measure best practice include:

- Percentage of infants exclusively breastfeeding and/or OMM-feeding at each time point
- Percentage of infants partially or not breastfeeding and/or OMM-feeding at each time point
  - Analyse reasons for sub-optimal rates
- Percentage of mothers achieving their breastfeeding goals

Auditing records on a monthly basis:

- Highlights recent progress and can enhance motivation within the organisation to continue with quality improvement measures.
- Shows where changes are still required and allows for timely implementation of further education to staff for continuous improvements in clinical practice.
- Allows barriers to be identified and addressed.