

PRESS RELEASE

Study Shows Moms Say Breastfeeding is Healthier, But Comes with Significant Barriers

Most Mothers and Other Caregivers Choose Breast Milk, But Say Important to Make an Informed Choice about Infant Formula

WASHINGTON, June 25, 2019 -- The bipartisan team of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (GQR) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) released results from their national survey of 1,200 mothers and caregivers with children less than 12 months of age that reveal the factors behind their infant feeding decisions¹. For the first time, the survey spoke not only to mothers, but also to fathers and other infant caregivers.

Most mothers, fathers, and others caregivers report using at least some breastmilk to feed their babies. Those who do choose formula largely do so out of necessity, either because of concerns about milk production, lack of support from their place of employment, or because the birth mother simply is not available. But even mothers who do breastfeed reported barriers and lack of support from their employers.

“Many mothers and caregivers want to be able to feed their baby breast milk, but often the focus on ‘breastfeeding only’ ignores the realities that families face – health barriers, lack of support at work and school, or a birth mom simply just not in the picture,” said Nicole McCleskey, Partner at POS.

Consistent with previous surveys, moms who move from breastfeeding to formula feeding tend to do so because they are not producing enough milk, face other physical problems breastfeeding, or are recommended to do so by their doctor. There are also other challenges: 72% of mothers say not having time to pump at work creates a barrier to breastfeeding; 71% say returning to work or school is a barrier; and 67% say employers not supporting pumping at work is a barrier.

Mothers, fathers and other caregivers want easy-to-understand and science-based information about breastfeeding and infant formula so they can make the important and personal decision on how to feed their infant. Those surveyed cite government websites as an important source of information on the topic, and encourage policymakers to provide accurate and unbiased information about infant feeding practices.

Rates of breastfeeding are rising ² with 70% of mothers indicating that they feed their baby with at least some breast milk. The survey also shows that 70% of infants are fed infant formula, either as a sole source of nutrition or as a supplement to breastmilk, at some point during their first year of life. The primary reasons for introducing infant formula are motivated by concerns with milk production.

¹ GQR and Public Opinion Strategies conducted a poll of mothers and caregivers that fielded from February 27 to March 11, 2019. The sample of mothers who had given birth in the last 12 months was conducted mostly online (n=800), with a few cell phone interviews (n=2); demographic controls based on the American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau of mothers who had a birth in the last 12 months were used to ensure representation. The sample of 400 caregivers was also conducted online; caregivers were defined as spending more than 30 hours per week caring for an infant under 12 months old, outside of commercial day care.

² GQR conducted a poll of n=876 mothers who had given birth in the last 12 months that fielded from May17-28, 2009, and again with n=1,001 mothers, including an oversample of n=210 Hispanic mothers, from August 8 – September 3, 2012.

Key findings from the survey include:

- As in past surveys, a large majority of mothers know breastfeeding is healthier for their babies – and the latest results show the same is true among fathers and other caregivers. This knowledge cuts across race, socio-economic status, and age and mothers on the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and those without a college degree.
- The majority of babies receive both breastmilk and infant formula in the first 12 months, and the primary reasons mothers introduce infant formula include low milk production, their infant not gaining enough weight, or problems with breastfeeding.
- Mothers, fathers, and other caregivers believe having access to accurate information on both breastfeeding and infant formula is critical, including in the hospital.
- Mothers, fathers, and other caregivers feel judged by others for their infant feeding choices, but want to be able to make their own decisions about what is best for a baby’s health.

Hospitals are recognized as a major source of infant feeding information, with most moms surveyed stating they believe restricting the use of, access to, or information about infant formula in the hospital would not have changed their breastfeeding practices.

The survey also identifies an opportunity for experts and government policymakers to reiterate that infant formula is the best and safest infant feeding option when mother’s own breast milk is not an option or is unavailable. This is important because more than half of mothers and caregivers did not consider homemade or sharing breast milk (which are not recommended infant feeding practices) to be “dangerous” or “risky.”

In general though, today’s moms, dads and caregivers are savvy when it comes to infant feeding and they believe infant feeding recommendations should support all moms and families in their infant feeding decisions.

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For more details about the survey, data points and methodology visit [\[insert website\]](#).

Media contact:

Anna Greenberg
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research
agreenberg@gqrr.com

Nicole McCleskey
Public Opinion Strategies
nicole@pos.org