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National Infant Feeding Poll Results¹

To: Interested Parties
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Public Opinion Strategies

Mothers in the United States know what is best for their babies. They recognize that breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for both their babies and themselves, and yet they realize that the decision of how to feed their babies is complex. Mothers often must balance competing needs of work or school and other family members, as well as address real life issues such as maintaining an adequate milk supply and covering the expense of a breast pump. The reality is that most moms do not choose either exclusive breastfeeding or feeding solely infant formula but use a combination of both at some point during their baby's first year of life. A large majority of mothers choose breastfeeding and also consider infant formula a safe, reliable alternative or supplement to breastfeeding.

Above all, mothers living in the U.S. believe they must have the right to make this choice for their own babies, themselves and their families. Impositions on this decision – either through inadequate support for breastfeeding in the workplace or restrictions on information about infant feeding options – are strongly opposed.

¹ Between May 17 and 28, 2009, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner interviewed a nationally representative sample of 876 mothers of children age 12 months or younger throughout the country. This research was commissioned by the International Formula Council. The sample was representative of the percent of U.S. mothers currently enrolled in the Government's Special Supplemental Feeding Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the questions were polled in English. Mothers of multiples, premature babies and adopted babies were screened out, because these mothers may have special circumstances that uniquely influenced decisions about how to feed their children. The overall margin of error of this survey is +/- 3.31.

The Infant Feeding Decision

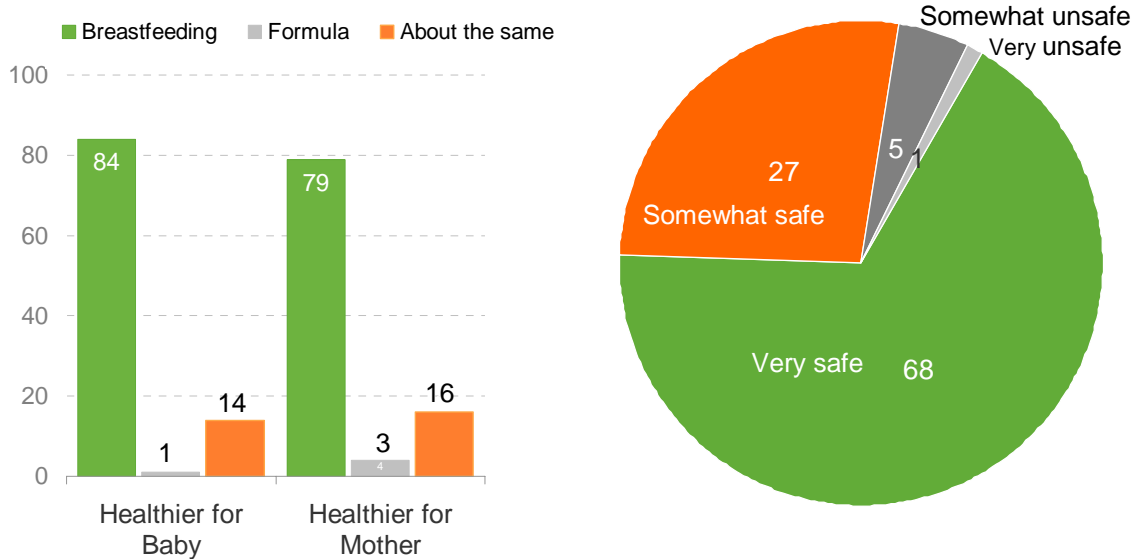
Most mothers make their infant feeding decisions prior to going to the hospital to give birth (83 percent). All mothers support their decisions using information from a wide variety of sources (i.e., their doctors, their babies' pediatricians, magazines, books, and the Internet). They also look to family members, friends, and lactation consultants for additional infant feeding support.

Mothers know that breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for their babies (84 percent) and themselves (79 percent). At the same time, mothers also believe that infant formula is a safe way for them to feed their babies (95 percent). And 90 percent of moms are confident that infant formula manufacturers are providing a safe product.

Figure 1: Breastfeeding More Healthy; Formula a Safe Alternative
 (Due to rounding, numbers do not always add up to 100)

From what you know, which [feeding method] is healthier for the baby? For the mother?

Regardless of how you choose to feed your baby, how safe do you believe infant formula is for your baby?



For most mothers, the decision about how to feed their babies is not an either/or choice between breast milk and infant formula. Over half (53 percent) of mothers report making a change in their baby's diet (breast milk to infant formula or vice-versa) in their baby's first year of life.

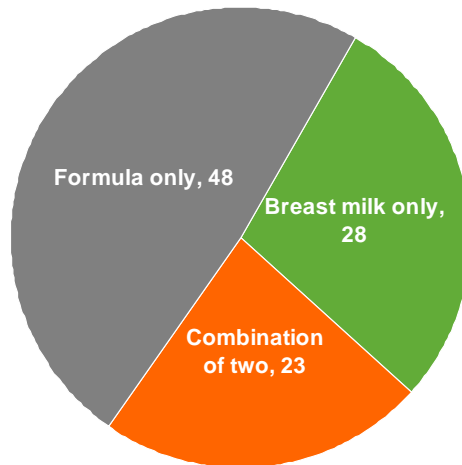
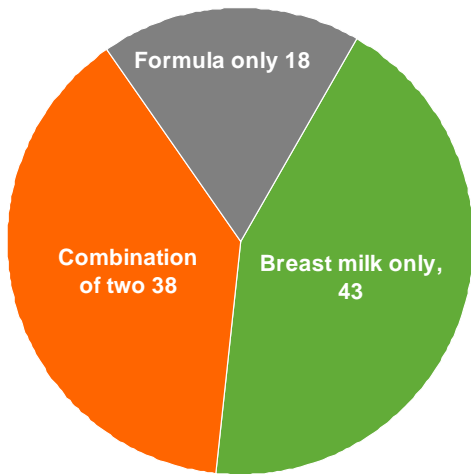
Forty-three percent of mothers with infants 0-6 months of age who changed feeding methods say they exclusively breastfed their baby previously, while 18 percent say they mostly used formula in the past and 38 percent used a combination of the two. Forty-eight percent of mothers of infants in this age range currently use formula only to feed their baby.

And among mothers with infants 7-12 months 67 percent of those who changed feeding methods exclusively or mostly breastfed their infant at one point in time, while 20 percent have mostly used formula.

■ Figure 2: Variety of Feeding Methods Among Mothers With Babies Aged 0-6 months (Due to rounding, numbers don't always add up to 100)

Which of the following did you use previously to feed your baby? Breast milk only, mostly breast milk with some formula, breast milk and formula equally, mostly formula with some breast milk; or formula only? (among those who changed feeding methods)

Which of the following best describes what you currently feed your baby? Breast milk only; mostly breast milk with some formula, breast milk and formula about equally; mostly formula with some breast milk; or formula only?



Barriers to Breastfeeding

When asked why they stopped breastfeeding, many mothers report barriers both when they initiated breastfeeding and throughout the first year. The most common barriers mentioned were demands of work or school (82 percent), inability to produce enough milk (81 percent), the feeling that breastfeeding restricts freedom (76 percent), and the expense of a breast pump (74 percent).

When asked which government actions would be most effective in helping increase breastfeeding initiation and duration in the U.S., most mothers supported actions that help mothers after they leave the hospital. Government-supported actions most favored by mothers included: guaranteeing paid maternity leave or longer maternity leave (33 percent); providing more support from healthcare professionals after mothers leave the hospital (17 percent); and providing support for breastfeeding in the workplace (13 percent). For mothers who participate in the federally-sponsored Women Infants and Children (WIC) program, the most common response was that the government could provide more support for non-food items like a breast pump (29 percent).

■ Figure 3: Government Supported Ways to Extend Breastfeeding

<i>Which of the following actions by the government do you believe would be the most effective in helping mothers breastfeed or breastfeed longer?</i>	
Guaranteeing paid maternity leave or longer maternity leave	33
Providing more support from health care professionals, AFTER mothers leave the hospital, including home visits following birth	17
Providing support for breastfeeding in the workplace, like break times and appropriate space	12
Providing more instruction and education on breastfeeding	10
Providing more support AT the hospital from health care professionals, including a lactation consultant	9
Protecting the right of women to breastfeed in public	3
Restricting infant formula samples and information given to mothers when they leave the hospital	2
None	2
All	8
Don't/ Know Refused	2

■ Figure 3 Continued: Government Supported Ways to Extend Breastfeeding

<i>Which of the following actions by WIC program do you believe would be the most effective in helping mothers breastfeed or breast feed longer?</i>	
Providing more support for non-food items like a breast pump, so women can continue to breastfeed when they go back to work	29
Providing more support AT the hospital from health care professionals, including a lactation consultant	17
Providing more support from health care professionals, AFTER mothers leave the hospital, including home visits following birth	15
Providing more instruction and education on breastfeeding, including help from peer counselors	9
Providing support for breastfeeding in the workplace, like break times and appropriate space	8
Restricting infant formula samples and information given to mothers when they leave the hospital	2
None	1
All	12
Don't/ Know Refused	7

Mothers Want Information, Flexibility, and Choice

A defining theme throughout the research is that mothers want the right to make an informed choice about how to feed their babies. Mothers want more information, not less, which is why they strongly oppose any restrictions on access to information about infant feeding options, including information on breastfeeding and infant formula. The desire for support and complete information is true whether or not mothers breastfeed or use infant formula.

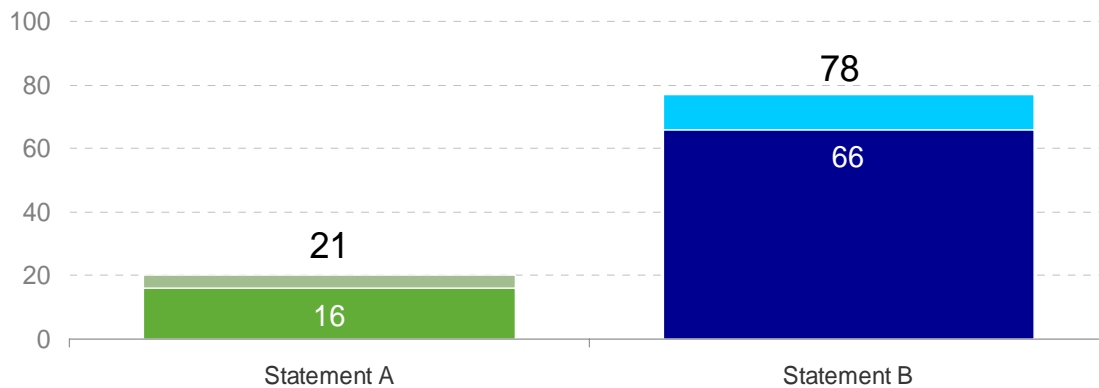
■ Figure 4: Mothers Want an Informed Choice on Feeding
(Due to rounding, numbers don't always add up to 100.)

Now let me read you two statements on ways to encourage mothers to breastfeed. After I have read both statements, please tell me which one you agree with the most.

Statement A: Some people say we should give new mothers only information on breastfeeding and not formula, in order to encourage them to breastfeed.

Statement B: Some people say new mothers should receive information on breastfeeding and other feeding options for their baby so they can make an informed choice and mothers should not have the information they receive restricted.

- Only breastfeeding info strongly
- Only breastfeeding info not so strongly
- Info on both strongly
- Info on both not so strongly



Most mothers agree that infant formula provides them with flexibility and choice, as well as a means of supplementing breastfeeding when necessary. For many mothers, it also provides an opportunity to rejoin the workforce.

■ Figure 5: Preferred Statement to Support Flexibility

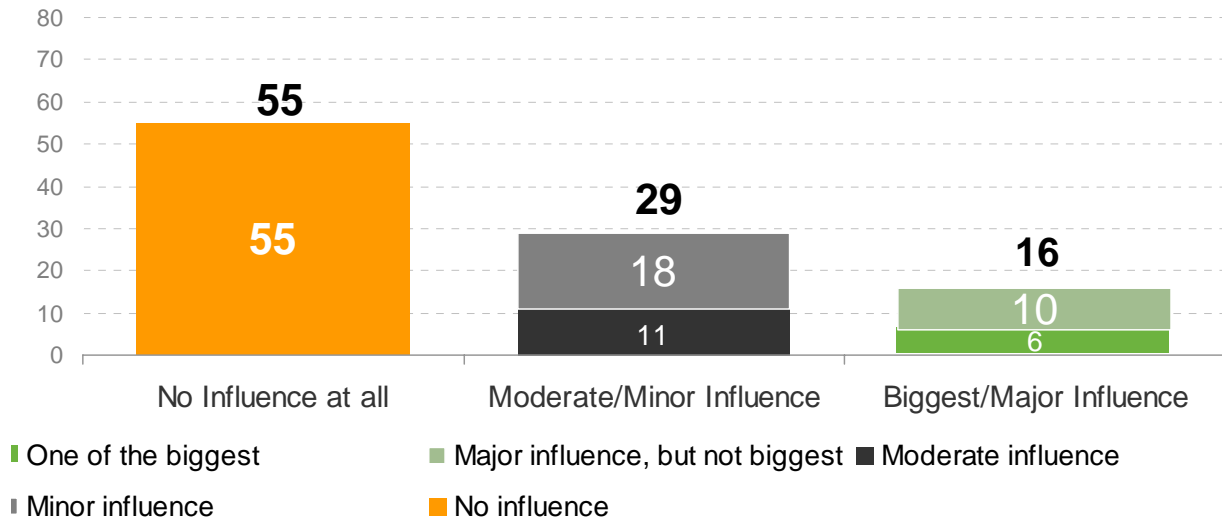
<i>Please tell me whether the first statement or the second statement comes closer to your own views.</i>	Statement Total
Infant formula provides mothers with flexibility and choices	82
There is no real need for infant formula, all mothers can and should breastfeed	15
Even mothers who breastfeed sometimes may need infant formula to supplement their baby’s diet	84
Breastfeeding is important enough to find a way to breastfeed regardless of circumstances	13
Infant formula provides a way for mothers to rejoin the workforce	60
New mothers forced to work can find jobs that allow them to breastfeed without resorting to infant formula	34

Almost all mothers (92 percent) approve of the practice of hospitals distributing diaper bags that include free samples of infant formula. Most mothers (79 percent) received samples of formula at the hospital before or right after they gave birth and most of these mothers (74 percent of those provided formula) used them. By a 76 to 23 percent margin, mothers oppose any state or federal law prohibiting hospitals from giving out diaper bags that include free samples of infant formula. Very few – just 16 percent – describe this practice as playing a significant role in their decision about what to feed their baby.

It is also notable that 85 percent of mothers believe it is very important for infant formula manufacturers to continue innovating and improving their infant formula; just 13 percent believe that innovation is unnecessary.

■ Figure 6: Free Samples Did Not Influence Choice

How much of an influence did free samples of infant formula have on your own decision about what to feed your baby? Was it one of the biggest influences, a major influence but not one of the biggest, a moderate influence, a minor influence, or not an influence at all?



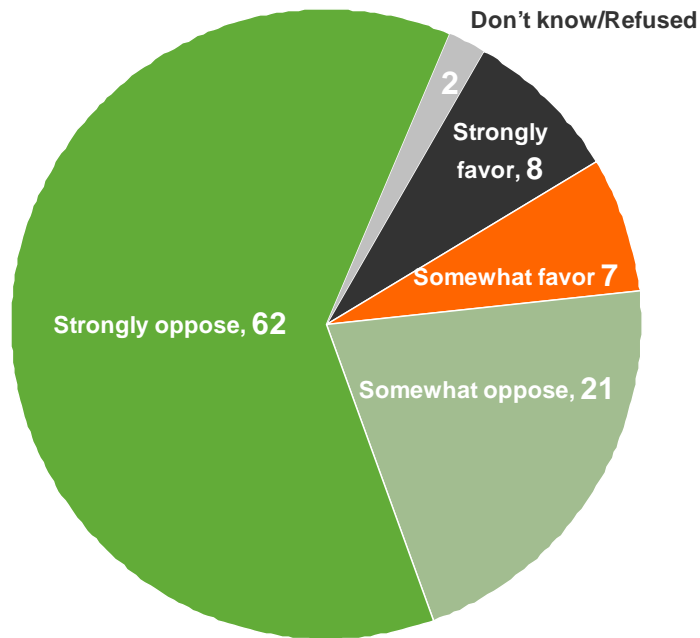
The results in Figure 6 are reinforced in the mixed reaction to the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI). When given an initial, general description of BFHI, just 49 percent support a BFHI, 47 percent oppose.²

² Language used in this question as follows: The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative recognizes and certifies hospitals promoting optimal levels of breastfeeding. Hospitals adopt a 10-step program that promotes breastfeeding as the safest and healthiest choice, including the training of staff about breastfeeding benefits, helping mothers initiate feeding within one hour of birth, and encouraging breastfeeding on demand. In order to qualify for the initiative, hospitals must pay an annual fee to maintain their certification, and hospitals must agree not to distribute free infant formula samples or literature on formula to mothers of newborn babies. After hearing this description do you support or oppose the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative?

When asked again specifically about the requirement included in the BFHI, which prohibits hospitals from providing infant formula samples or literature to new mothers, 83 percent oppose, while just 15 percent support this component of the initiative. Among mothers that currently breastfeed their baby, 76 percent oppose this restriction. Fifty-eight percent said the BFHI would not have helped them breastfeed or breastfeed longer. As previously stated, mothers most commonly report the major barriers to breastfeeding are after leaving the hospital. It is clear that mothers want programs which support breastfeeding and healthy babies, but feel that banning formula samples is the wrong way to achieve those objectives.

■ Figure 7: Lack of Support for Restrictions on Samples and Information

As I described earlier, one component of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative is the following: Hospitals can no longer provide infant formula samples or literature on formula to new mothers. Do you favor or oppose this part of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative?



Conclusion

These results underscore the fact that mothers want full information, flexibility, and choices. Mothers know breastfeeding is the healthiest infant feeding option; they also know infant feeding practices can be complex, often complicated by competing demands in their lives (i.e., work/school, other children, health issues). At a minimum, they want the right to make the choice free from restrictions, such as a supportive work environment that allows the opportunity and privacy to pump, or supportive legislative and regulatory environments that do not restrict access to and information on all infant feeding options, including infant formula.