



For Immediate Release

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National Survey Shows Mothers Want Control Over Infant Feeding Choices

98 percent of mothers say, "Ultimately, it should be my decision how I choose to feed my baby."

WASHINGTON (October 1, 2012) – In July, 2012, New York City attempted to lock up infant formula to encourage more moms to breast feed. In September of this year, hospitals in Tulsa banned gift bags to new mothers with free sample of formula. In July, Massachusetts became the second state (after Rhode Island) where hospitals voluntarily banned sending new mothers home with gift bags. These are but three recent examples of national efforts to restrict access to formula or information about formula feeding. The problem is, no one asked mothers about this new policy.

Until now.

In a nationally representative survey of new mothers, conducted by the bipartisan team of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (GQRR) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS), mothers strongly oppose hospital and government policies banning gift bags or other items containing information on infant formula and free samples. Despite the national trend towards banning infant formula samples in hospitals, the survey shows mothers want and use the infant formula samples they receive and oppose any hospital or government measure to limit access to infant feeding information in hospitals. Mothers identify two leading barriers to breast feeding: conflicts with work life and health issues inhibiting or preventing the continuation of this feeding method. Neither of these will be addressed by restricting access to formula.

More than anything, mothers demand the autonomy to make the decision—with full access to necessary information and literature--about what is best for their family for themselves.

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Note to Editors: Between August 8 and September 3, 2012, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Public Opinion Strategies interviewed 1001 mothers of children age 12 months or younger throughout the country. This sample included an oversample of 210 Hispanic mothers. Mothers of multiples, pre-mature babies and adopted babies were screened out to give us a sample of mothers without medically determined or influenced decisions about how to feed their children. The overall margin of error of this survey is +/- 3.10. This research was sponsored by the International Formula Council, an association of manufacturers and marketers of formulated nutrition products. For more information on the findings of this survey, please visit www.MomsFeedingFreedom.com.

“With the majority of babies receiving some amount of infant formula at some point during their first year, it’s important that moms have access to all infant feeding information so they can make fully informed decisions,” said Anna Greenberg, Senior Vice President at GQRR.

“This survey underscores the reality that when it comes to infant feeding, mothers want full information, flexibility, and choices,” Greenberg continues. “Mothers know what is best for their baby, but they also know that infant feeding is complex and they want the right to make their decision based on all available information and in an environment where mothers’ choice is supported.”

When asked what actions could help increase breastfeeding in the U.S., mothers said they would like to see increased access to healthcare support after leaving the hospital, guaranteed paid maternity leave or longer maternity leave, and breast feeding support in the workplace. “It seems like these are areas where healthcare providers, the government and employers could support mothers to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates,” Greenberg added.

Mothers identified a number of other barriers that either prevented them from initiating or continuing breastfeeding, the most common of which include the inability to produce enough milk and problems associated with breastfeeding (e.g., sore or cracked nipples, engorged or leaking breasts, breasts infected or abscessed). “Many mothers want to breastfeed,” stated Nicole McCleskey, Partner at POS, “but oftentimes they realize that when it’s time to go back to work, continuing to exclusively breastfeed and maintain their milk supply can be difficult without adequate support.”

Main Findings from Survey

Mothers strongly oppose efforts to restrict formula.

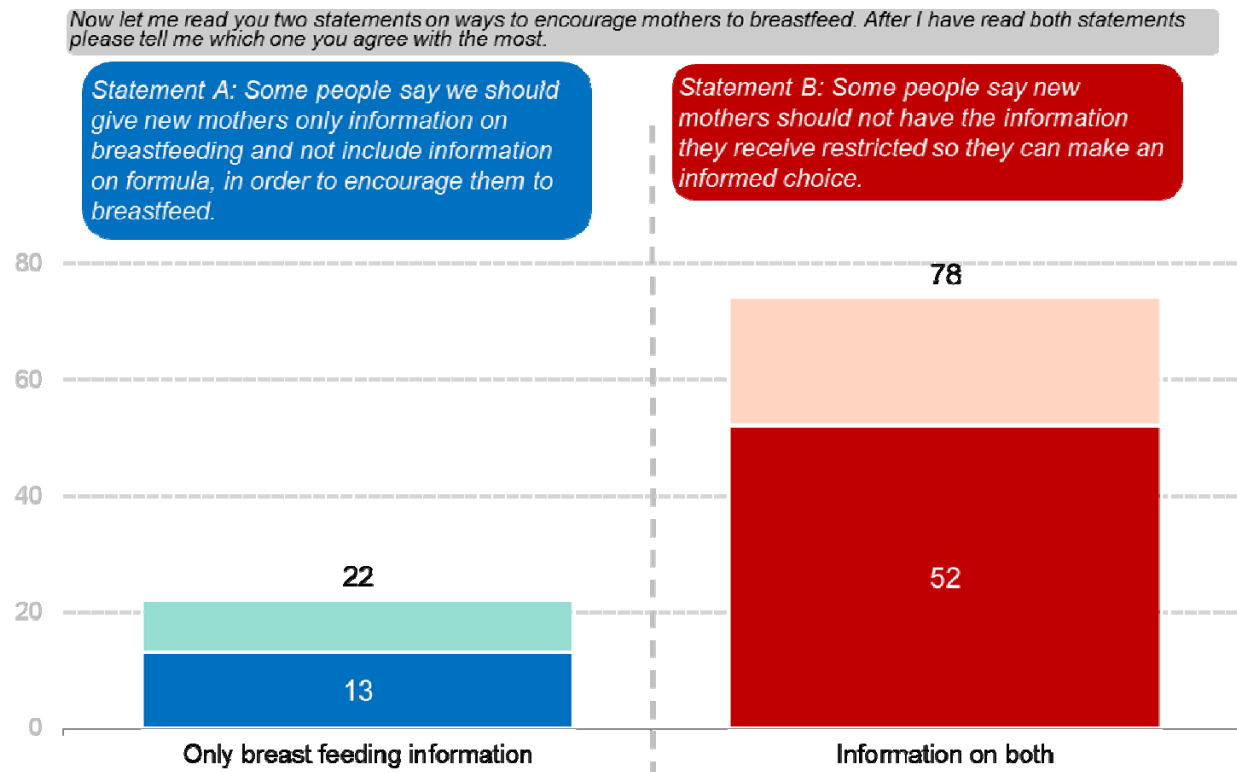
A nearly unanimous 98 percent of mothers agree, “ultimately, it should be my decision how I choose to feed my baby,” (91 percent strongly agree) and 97 percent agree, “Hospitals should provide information about both infant formula and breast feeding so mothers have all the information they need to make an informed choice,” (83 percent strongly agree).

The level of consensus and intensity on these issues is not surprising, but it translates into strong opposition to efforts to restrict access to infant formula. A 72 percent majority disagree (51 percent strongly) with the statement, “hospitals should restrict access to infant formula for all new mothers, to encourage them to feed their babies breast milk.”

Little wonder that 77 percent oppose policies that ban hospitals from giving out gift bags with formula (63 percent strongly oppose) and 70 percent oppose policies to restrict the use of infant formula for all moms unless medically indicated (52 percent strongly).

In the end, it is about who should make this decision and about giving mothers the information to make an informed choice.

■ **Figure 1: Mothers Want an Informed Choice on Feeding**



These results are consistent with a survey taken by GQR and POS three years ago among new mothers that also showed huge opposition to efforts to interfere with mother’s autonomy. However, one thing that is changing is mothers’ experience at the hospital.

Mothers Use and Support Gift Bags, Even While they Practice Declines

Mothers appreciate being provided samples of infant formula to take home. A 90 percent majority of new mothers approve of the practice of receiving gift bags which can include free samples of infant formula and information about formula feeding; 68 percent strongly support this practice.

However, this practice seems to be diminishing. A 69 percent majority were offered samples of formula to take home at the hospitals in the survey taken this year and 76 percent of these moms report using these samples. However, the number of mothers being offered these samples dropped 10 points in just three years (79 percent reported being offered gift bags three years ago).

This is evidence that the current campaign against gift bags is having a national impact, despite mothers' clear preference and despite measures in in this survey suggesting this campaign will not increase incidence of breast feeding.

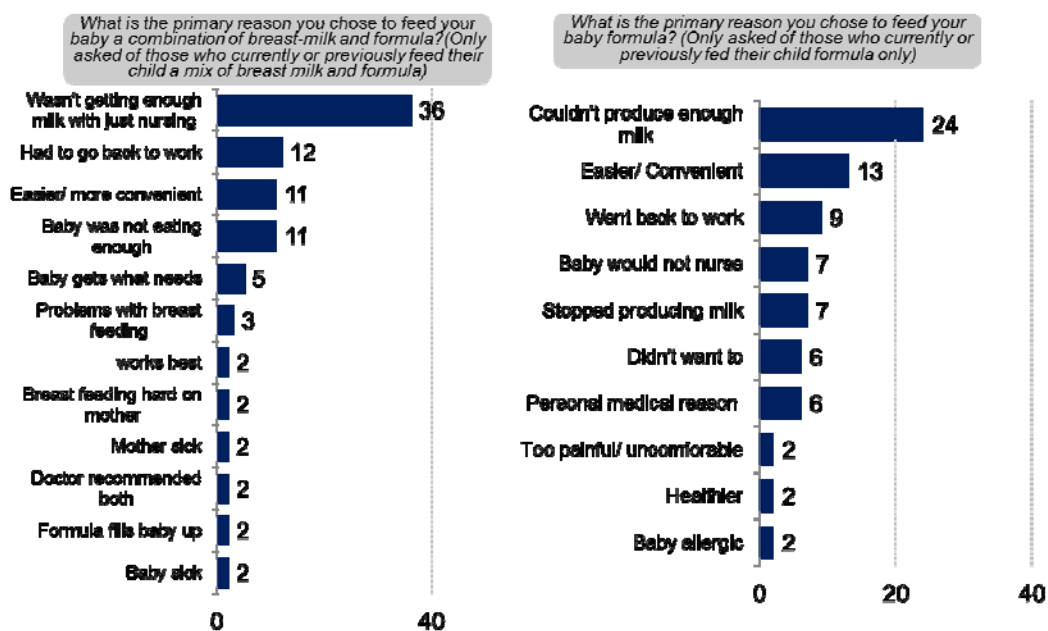
Campaign Unlikely to Have Desired Impact

Efforts to restrict formula at the hospital may be well intentioned, but are unlikely to be effective. A 94 percent majority of mothers say restricting the use of formula in the hospital would not have changed their decision about whether or not to breastfeed. Moreover, most mothers (87 percent) make this decision either before giving birth (71 percent) or after arriving home from the hospital (16 percent).

There are steps that can be taken to increase breast feeding, starting by understanding how mothers make this decision and asking mothers themselves about some of the barriers to breast feeding. Mothers know full-well that breast feeding the healthiest option for both their babies (81 percent feel this way) and for themselves (79 percent). A near unanimous 95 percent received information about how to feed their baby at the hospital or birthing center. A 69 percent majority breast fed their baby at some point during their child's first year.

However, mothers also need to balance these benefits against other obligations to their families, particularly work obligations. Moreover, many mothers face significant health issues in their first year which inhibit or prevent breast feeding. Work and health issues emerge as the two leading reasons why mothers turn to formula. Neither of these will be addressed by restricting formula at hospitals.

Figure 2: Reason to Choose Formula, Mix of Formula and Breast-Milk



These same two issues emerge when we ask mothers to rate a number of potential barriers to breast feeding.¹ The cost of a breast pump also emerges as major barrier. Infant formula company marketing stands at the bottom of this list.

■ **Figure 3:** Barriers to Breastfeeding

| <i>Does the following represent a major barrier when it comes to breastfeeding, a minor barrier, not much of a barrier or no barrier at all?</i> | Major Barrier |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Not being able to produce enough milk | 68 |
| Employer does not support pumping at work | 58 |
| Returning to work or school | 57 |
| Baby not eating enough | 55 |
| No time to pump at work | 55 |
| Breast pump is too expensive | 47 |
| Lack of support or education at the hospital or birthing center | 41 |
| No access to support from when health care professional or others when there are problems | 38 |
| Lack of information about the benefits of breast feeding | 37 |
| Requires mother to do most of the caregiving | 31 |
| Formula is easier and more convenient | 29 |
| Society frowns on public breast feeding | 29 |
| Restrictions on a mother's diet | 23 |
| Partner or other family member is unable to feed the baby | 22 |
| Restricts freedom | 19 |
| Infant formula company marketing | 15 |

Positive Steps to Increase Breast Feeding

There are steps that can increase incidence of breast feeding. Among WIC mothers—mothers who participate in the federal Women, Infants & Children program-- 28 percent identify help with non-food items like a breast pump so they can continue to breast feed after work. Non-WIC mothers look for longer maternity leave as their leading response. Both groups are more likely to identify help after they leave the hospital than help at the hospital as more effective in increasing breast feeding.

¹ It is important to recognize that mothers were asked whether or not these barriers represented a major, minor, not much of a barrier or no barrier at all when it comes to breast feeding, not necessarily whether or not these barriers impacted their own ability to breast feed.

■ **Figures 4 and 5:** Ways to Extend Breast-feeding

Which of the following actions by WIC, or the Women, Infants, & Children program, do you believe would be the most effective in increasing breastfeeding rates (Only asked of those who have participated in WIC)

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Providing more support for non-food items like a breast pump, so women can continue to breastfeed when they go back to work | 28 |
| Providing more support from health care professionals, AFTER mothers leave the hospital, including home visits following birth | 20 |
| Providing more support AT the hospital from health care professionals, including a lactation consultant. | 15 |
| Providing more instruction and education on breastfeeding, including help from peer counselors | 14 |
| None of these | 9 |
| All | 10 |
| Don't know/Refused | 4 |

Which of the following actions by the government do you believe would be the most effective in increasing breast feeding rates? (Only asked of those who have not participated in WIC)

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Guaranteeing paid maternity leave or longer maternity leave | 29 |
| Providing more support from health care professionals, AFTER mothers leave the hospital, including home visits following birth | 15 |
| Providing support for breastfeeding in the workplace, like break times and appropriate space | 13 |
| Providing more support AT the hospital from health care professionals, including a lactation consultant. | 10 |
| Providing more instruction and education on breastfeeding | 7 |
| Protecting the right of women to breastfeed in public | 3 |
| Restricting access to infant formula, including access to samples and information given to mothers | 2 |
| None of these | 7 |
| All | 11 |
| Don't know/Refused | 1 |

Conclusion

Mothers do not question or fail to understand the advantages of breast feeding. But they understand that life requires them to balance these advantages against other family obligations. Mothers also insist—loudly, consistently and nearly unanimously—that this is their choice to make. They oppose restrictions on this choice, be it office policies that inhibit breastfeeding or hospital policies that restrict information on infant formula. These findings are very consistent with a poll taken three years ago. Despite the fact that gift bags are hugely popular among mothers, this practice is diminishing without compelling evidence these steps will increase incidence of breast feeding.