Breastfeeding Definitions and Data Collection Periods

Introduction:
This breastfeeding definitions and data collection periods guideline was developed by the Provincial / Territorial subcommittee of the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada to contribute to a database for describing the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding in Canada. Monitoring the intake of breast milk is a health indicator – useful in planning, implementing and evaluating the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding and thus the health of our infant population. Most health regions / health authorities in Canada are collecting or planning to collect breastfeeding information. It is hoped that this document will facilitate data collection that is consistent and can be used to compare breastfeeding practices between regions and provinces/territories. Developed from the population health perspective the definitions and process for data collection are simple so that many individuals can collect relevant, accurate and consistent data.

Following a review of the literature and consultation with additional experts the WHO definitions form the basis of the breastfeeding definitions in this document. They describe the breast milk intake of infants and do not include how the infant has received the breastmilk nor specify the types of other food or liquid.

Two algorithms are provided as guidelines for data collection: the first algorithm is for infants from birth up to the age of six months, and the second algorithm is for infants over six months of age.

Breastfeeding Definitions:

**Breastmilk includes** breastfeeding, expressed breastmilk or donor milk and undiluted drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicines.

**Exclusive breastmilk** – no food or liquid other than breastmilk, not even water, is given to the infant from birth by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter.

**Total breastmilk** – no food or liquid other than breastmilk, not even water, is given to the infant from birth by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter during the past 7 days. *(This definition identifies infants who are exclusively breastfeeding at the time of data collection but not from birth. There are many infants who initially receive a supplement(s) at some point but exclusively breastfeed following this temporary intervention. However, based on the above definition they can no longer be classified as having exclusive breastmilk).*

**Predominant breastmilk** – breast milk, given by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter plus 1 or a maximum of 2 feeds of any food or liquid including non-human milk, during the past 7 days.

**Partial breastmilk** – breast milk, given by the mother, health care provider, or family member/supporter plus 3 or more feeds of any food or liquid including non-human milk, during the past 7 days.

**No breastmilk** – the infant/child receives no breastmilk.
Recommended Times to Collect Infant Feeding Data

For Baby-Friendly™ designation, hospitals are required to record data on initiation rates and rates of exclusive breastfeeding on discharge. In supporting the recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding to six months and the need to collect consistent breastfeeding data in the community setting the recommended time frames for data collection up to six months are shown in bold type. While precision in time is considered important, it is realized that the community data will not be collected precisely at two weeks, two months etc. for every mother and baby. To facilitate standardizing the time frames that the recommended data should be recorded a mutually exclusive description of each time period is included.

Age of Infant at recommended data collection time periods:

- **Initiation – at birth**
- **Hospital/clinic discharge (not applicable for home births)**
- **2 weeks – includes the period between hospital discharge to 4 weeks**
- **2 months - includes the period between 5 weeks and 12 weeks**
- **6 months – includes the period between 21 weeks and 27 weeks**

Additional data collection time periods (optional):

- **4 months – includes the period between 13 weeks and 20 weeks**
- **8 months – includes the period between 28 weeks and 40 weeks**
- **12 months – includes the period of 11 to 15 months**
- **18 months – includes the period of 16 to 21 months**
- **24 months – includes the period of 22 to 25 months**

Footnote: Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended to 6 months of age. After six months breastfeeding should be continued with the introduction of complementary solids.

Rationale regarding essential time frames for data collection:

- 2 weeks – A critical time frame for women to receive support for continuation of breastfeeding (i.e. many cease breastfeeding prematurely due to lack of appropriate support)
- 2 months – An important time for support of exclusive breastfeeding and counsel regarding the recommendation of delaying the introduction of complementary foods until the infant is six months of age.
- 6 months – An important time for reinforcing breastfeeding to one year and beyond and appropriate introduction of complementary foods.

The recommended time frames have been suggested but this does not preclude Health Regions/Authorities collecting data at the additional times provided.

References:

Algorithm For Breastfeeding Data Collection For Infants Birth ≤ 6 Months Of Age

Age of Baby: ______________

What Baby Has Been Fed*

Breastfeeding**
   / Breastmilk

Breastfeeding / Breastmilk and other liquids / foods***

No Breastmilk, Received other liquids / foods,

During past week baby received only breastmilk?

Yes

Has baby received only breastmilk since birth?

Yes

Exclusive Breastmilk

No

Total Breastmilk

Predominant Breastmilk

Partial Breastmilk

No Breastmilk

During past week number of times baby received liquids / foods in addition to breastmilk?

1 or 2

3 or more

*Interpretation for hospital births at discharge – What baby has been fed since birth? The ‘predominant’ and ‘partial’ breastmilk categories may be combined to make one category (both) in hospital records.

*Interpretation in Community Health settings – What baby has been fed during the past 7 days? The above categories will provide a ‘snapshot’ of feeding practices for infants at a specific time frame.

**Breastmilk includes breastfeeding, expressed breastmilk or donor milk and undiluted drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicines.

***Other liquids or foods include commercial formula, water/glucose water, evaporated milks, goat’s milk, and traditional drinks such as sweetened and flavored waters, teas and infusions, and cereals and thickeners.
Algorithm For Breastfeeding Data Collection For Infants Over 6 Months Of Age

Age of Child: _______________

Have Complementary Foods Been Introduced?

No
Refer to algorithm for infants less than 6 months

Yes

In addition to complementary foods what liquids has the baby been receiving in the past 7 days?

Total Breastmilk (breastmilk only)

Predominant to Partial Breastmilk (breastmilk and other liquids)

No Breastmilk