



## World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 1-7 August 2024

### Closing the Gap: Support Breastfeeding for All

#### WBW Annual Survey Summary

##### Survey Content

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association (BFHIHKA) was incorporated in 1994 to promote, protect and support breastfeeding in Hong Kong. As part of the World Breastfeeding Week activity, BFHIHKA conducts an annual survey on the Breastfeeding Rates on discharge from hospitals with maternity units and also their practice of the “Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding”.

##### Breastfeeding Rate of newborns on discharge from hospital

Births in 2023	Breastfeeding Rate		Exclusive Breastfeeding Rate	
	%	Range %	%	Range %
Public hospitals	80.09	69-88	19.74	12-26
Private hospitals	89.37	84-97	4.07	0.1-46
<b>Total</b>	<b>83.58</b>	<b>69-97</b>	<b>13.86</b>	<b>0.1-46</b>

##### Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding

Steps with a difference of 10% or more compared with the previous year:

##### Improvement:

Nil

##### Deterioration:

2.2b 20-hours of training given to paediatric nursing staff within six months of their arrival.

## Report on WBW Survey 2024

### Introduction

The Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) was launched by WHO and UNICEF in 1991 following the Innocenti Declaration of 1990. The initiative is a global effort to implement practices that protect, promote and support breastfeeding. Hospitals with maternity units that implement the WHO/UNICEF Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (Ten Steps) and comply with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly resolutions (the Code) could apply for designation as baby-friendly hospitals. Since its launch, BFHI's Ten Steps have become a global guidance with more than 20,000 maternity facilities having been designated as "baby-friendly". The initiative has measurable and proven impact, increasing the likelihood of babies being exclusively breastfed for the first six months according to WHO's Global strategy for infant and young child feeding. Furthermore, the initiative has been extended from hospitals to community facilities.

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association (BFHIHKA) started the programme of designating health facilities as baby-friendly in 2013. Since then, all eight public hospitals have been designated as baby-friendly hospitals in Hong Kong with three having undergone revalidation. Hence all births in public hospitals and around 62% in the entire territory were in baby-friendly hospitals in 2023. Two private hospitals are at different stages of designation. To better support mothers in the antenatal and postnatal periods, Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) are also joining the programme. Eight MCHCs have already been designated as baby-friendly MCHCs with three have undergone revalidation, while twenty others have started the process.<sup>1</sup>

Countries around the world celebrate the World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) from 1-7 August every year. The theme of WBW this year is "Closing the gap: Support breastfeeding for all"<sup>2</sup> which focus on survival, health and wellbeing. The theme highlights the need for all parties in the community to work on improving breastfeeding support to reduce inequalities that exist in our society with a special focus on breastfeeding in times of emergencies and crises.

BFHIHKA takes this opportunity every year to conduct a survey to monitor practices that support breastfeeding before mothers are discharged from maternity units in Hong Kong.

### Method

The 8 public and 11 private hospitals in Hong Kong providing maternity service in 2023 were invited to participate in our annual survey. The survey was a self-assessment and covered the following areas:

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<sup>1</sup> Progress of designation of baby-friendly health facilities. <https://www.babyfriendly.org.hk/en/healthcare-facilities/>

<sup>2</sup> World Breastfeeding Week 2024. World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action. <https://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>

## Breastfeeding rate

### *The breastfeeding rate of newborns on discharge from hospital*

Each hospital reported on the number of live births in the hospital in 2023 and the breastfeeding rate upon discharge for that year. The breastfeeding rate was defined as the number of babies that were breastfeeding on the day of discharge divided by the total number of live births.

### *Exclusive breastfeeding rate in hospital*

Each hospital is to report on their exclusive breastfeeding rate for live births in 2023. The exclusive breastfeeding rate was defined as the number of breastfed babies not given any food or drink other than breastmilk before discharge, divided by the total number of live births.

For babies that had been admitted into the neonatal unit from birth or from the postnatal ward, unless they were discharged earlier, their feeding status was captured at the age of one month.

## The implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in 2024

In 1989, the World Health Organization and UNICEF issued a joint statement titled “Promoting, Protecting and Supporting Breastfeeding: The Special Role of Maternity Services” with a set of guidelines for maternity units to follow in order to provide optimal breastfeeding support to mothers. This set of guidelines is called the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (Ten Steps). The Ten Steps were revised in 2018<sup>3</sup> but as hospitals need time to make the transition, they were asked to complete a questionnaire on how they were implementing the Ten Steps based on the previous version except that Step 10 was updated.

## Results

All 8 public and 11 private hospitals invited participated in our survey.

### Survey Population

	<i>No. of births in 2023</i>	<i>No. of births in 2022</i>
Public hospitals (8)	20,741	19,730
Private hospitals (11)	12,480	12,766
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,221</b>	<b>32,496</b>

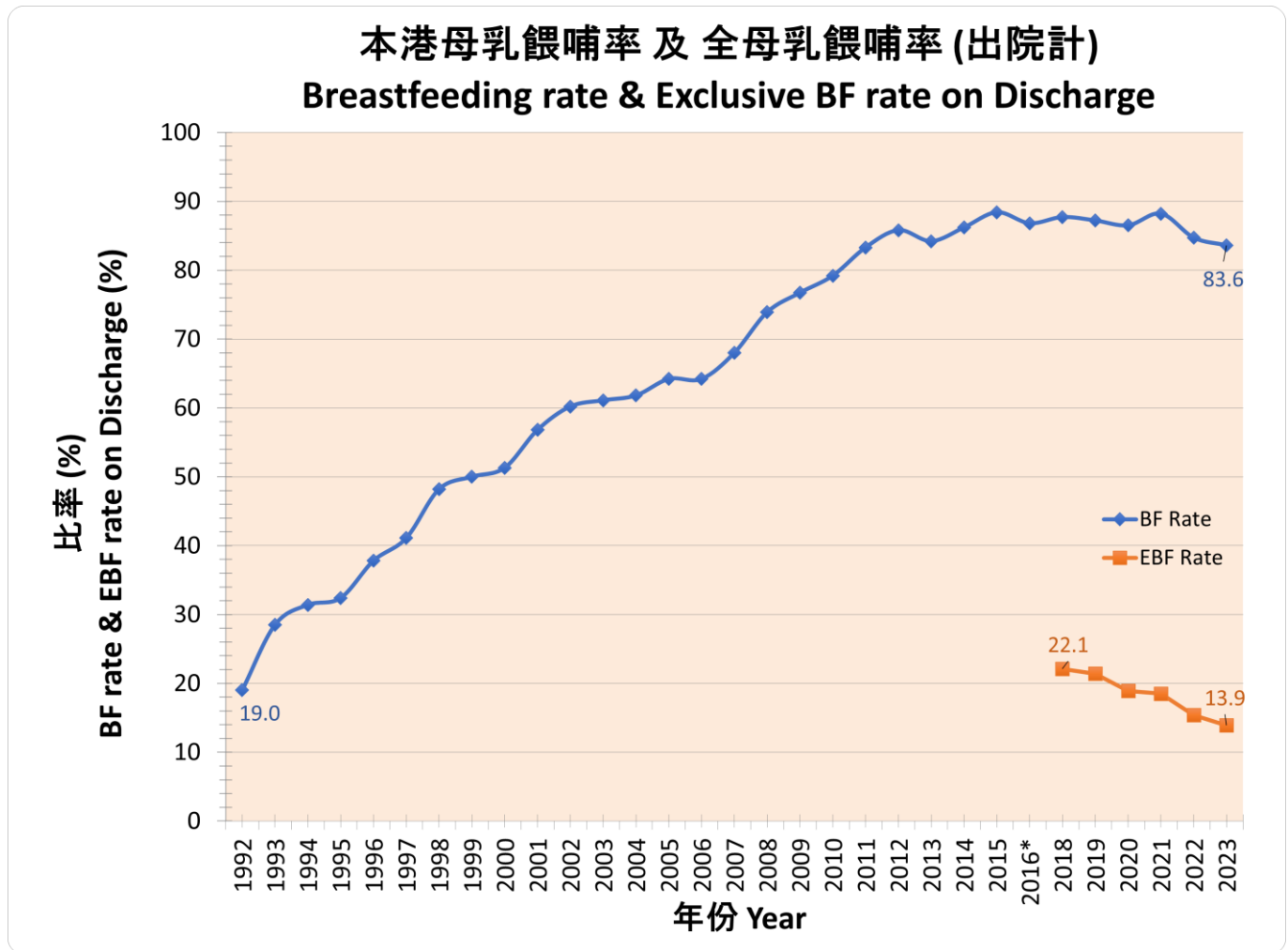
<sup>3</sup> Implementation guidance: protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding in facilities providing maternity and new-born services – the revised Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241513807>



Breastfeeding rate

*Breastfeeding rate on discharge from hospital*

The breastfeeding rate, whether exclusive or mixed, on discharge from hospital for births in 2023 from all public and private hospitals in Hong Kong was 83.58%. For public hospitals the rate was 80.09%; for private hospitals, the rate was 89.37%.



Remarks: 2016\*- The statistics of breastfeeding rate was from the Department of Health of the Government of HKSAR. For year 2017, statistic was not illustrated due to invalid replies and figures.

*Exclusive breastfeeding rate in hospital*

The rate in public hospitals was 19.74% for the year with a range of 12-26%. For private hospitals the rate was 4.07% with a range from 0.1% to 46%. The overall exclusive breastfeeding rate was 13.86% for both public and private hospitals.

## **The implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in 2024<sup>4</sup> (Appendix I)**

### ***STEP 1 - Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff***

All public hospitals have a written breastfeeding policy that is displayed publicly and routinely communicated to all health care staff. Among all private hospitals, 1 (9%) of which do not have a written policy while 3 (27%) do not have the policy displayed in public.

### ***STEP 2 - Train all health care staff in skills necessary to implement this policy***

All public and private hospitals thought their staff are acquainted with the policy. 96% of obstetric nurses and 91% of paediatric nurses received at least 20 hours training in public hospitals while 86% of obstetric nurses and 66% (among 9 hospitals with information) of paediatric nurses received such training in the private sector.

For doctors' training, 93% of obstetric and paediatric doctors received at least 8 hours training in public hospitals, while 56% of obstetric doctors and 45% of paediatric doctors received such training in 6 private hospitals that provided the information.

### ***STEP 3 - Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding***

Nearly all pregnant women, 95% in public and 99% in private hospitals received information about the advantages and management of breastfeeding. One of the private hospitals still give group instructions on artificial feeding.

### ***STEP 4 - Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within half an hour of birth***

For mothers with vaginal births and Caesarean Section without general anaesthesia, 51% in public hospitals and 47% in private hospitals undertook skin-to-skin contact with their new-borns for at least one hour within 5 minutes after birth. For mothers who had a Caesarean Section under general anaesthesia, 22% of them in public hospitals and 46% of them in 10 private hospitals with information had skin-to-skin contact with their babies when they were responsive and alert.

### ***STEP 5 - Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infants***

All public and private hospitals are offering mothers help to breastfeed within six hours of delivery and help mothers to maintain lactation if their babies are admitted to the special care unit.

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<sup>4</sup> Percentages given are averages of all that are provided by hospitals unless otherwise stated.



**STEP 6 - Give new-born infants no food or drink other than breastmilk, unless medically indicated**

75% of public and 64% private hospitals are not offering any food or drink other than breastmilk to breastfed babies unless medically indicated. All hospitals do not receive free or low-cost supplies of breastmilk substitutes. All public hospitals and private hospitals do not have promotions of infant foods or drinks other than breastmilk.

**STEP 7 - Practise rooming-in – allow mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day**

All public hospitals and 4 (36%) of private hospitals practise 24-hour rooming-in of mothers and babies with normal vaginal delivery from birth. 40% of babies in public hospitals with a range of 24 to 46%, and 4% in private hospitals with a range of 1-10% were separated from mothers for medical reasons. No public hospital maintains a nursery in the postnatal ward for healthy babies, but all maternity units in private hospitals still keep a nursery for healthy babies.

**STEP 8 - Encourage breastfeeding on demand (responsive feeding)**

All public hospitals encourage responsive breastfeeding while 36% of private hospitals do so.

**STEP 9 - Give no artificial teats or pacifiers (also called dummies or soothers) to breastfeeding infants**

All public hospitals and 9 (82%) of private hospitals do not use bottles with artificial teats or pacifiers for breastfed babies.

**STEP 10 – Coordinate discharge so that parents and their infants have timely access to ongoing support and care**

All public and private hospitals informed breastfeeding mothers how to access support in the community and coordinate with services that provide clinical management. 4 (50%) of public hospitals and 8 (73%) of private hospitals coordinate with mother-to-mother support.

Hospitals were also asked whether they were implementing the Ten Steps and how the implementation could be improved. All public and 9 private hospitals considered themselves as having implemented Ten Steps. Most concerned on staff training and ensuring their competency in supporting mothers in breastfeeding and managing difficulties encountered. They see the need for improvement in the practice of skin-to-skin contact for both vaginal and Caesarian birth. Others concerned on the trend of increasing request from mothers for supplementation and noted the need to strengthen the antenatal education to help mothers understand the risk of formula supplementation. Some also mentioned on the need to encourage the practice of rooming-in which is an essential step to facilitate responsive feeding and ensure successful breastfeeding.





## Discussion

Compared with the year before, the no. of births in 2023 was slightly increased by 2.23%. However, the breastfeeding rate on discharge dropped from 84.71% to 83.58% and the exclusive breastfeeding rate from 15.3% to 13.86%<sup>5</sup>. The rate of separation of mothers and babies for medical reasons remain high with a range of 23.7-45.7% in public hospitals. Most private hospitals continue to keep healthy babies in nurseries though some allow rooming-in on mothers' request that come up with various factors making responsive feeding difficult.

For the implementation of the Ten Steps in 2024, one hospital still does not have a written infant feeding policy while additional two hospitals do not display the policy publicly. Communicating an explicit policy including all Ten Steps and the Code to the staff and public is the essential first step in BFHI.

There is an apparent decrease in training for paediatric nurses in the private sector in 2023 compared with 2022. Only with competent staff teams, mothers could be well supported in breastfeeding and health of the infants could be well guaranteed.

There is still 1 hospital provide group instructions on artificial feeding which gives mothers the message that artificial feeding is the norm.

Public hospitals have an improvement of 4.45% on skin-to-skin contact for babies delivered vaginally or caesarean section without general anaesthesia while there is 5.46% decrease in private hospitals. In Caesarean deliveries under general anaesthesia, the figure of skin-to-skin contact remains low in the year 2023 with the percentages widely vary from none to 62% among public hospitals and none to 100% in private hospitals. Supports and co-operations from all working parties are required if the standards on this aspect to be improved to benefit more mothers and babies.

Formula supplementation to newborns reported by hospitals remains high while the exclusive breastfeeding rate continue to decrease in the previous year. When mothers are told on the benefits of breastfeeding, they need to understand the risks of formula supplementation. Not enough breast milk is the most common reason for formula supplementation, practical support to mothers for effective breastfeeding is important. To well protect babies against the risk of formula supplementation, all the Ten Steps for successful breastfeeding should be applied.

There were more private hospitals trying to implement the rooming-in policy when compared with the 2023 survey. However, keeping the nursery in postnatal ward still hindered the practice of responsive feeding.

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<sup>5</sup> 2023 World Breastfeeding Week Survey Report. BFHIHKA.

[https://www.babyfriendly.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-WBW-Annual-Survey\\_E.pdf](https://www.babyfriendly.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-WBW-Annual-Survey_E.pdf)

All hospitals give information to mothers about where to seek help with infant feeding after discharge, some hospitals provide phone or clinic follow-up sessions to better support mothers.

Over the years, all public hospitals and some private hospitals understand what the Ten Steps entail with the programme of BFHI. The establishment of breastfeeding policy with a monitoring system to the implementation and well communicated this policy to both the health care staff and the public make it clear to all the standards of the hospital. A system-in-place to record and monitor the policy implementation can help to keep tracking the progress and evaluation for practice that make continuous quality improvement measurable. All the Steps need hospital administrative support, staff participation, public awareness and acceptance. All parties need to work together to have the service and practice modification, that mothers are well supported to practice the responsive feeding and thus can improve the exclusive breastfeeding.

### Concluding Remarks

2023 is the tenth year since the Association had started the programme of designating Baby-friendly Health Facilities and marks an important milestone in the history of breastfeeding promotion in Hong Kong. All 8 Public Hospitals with maternity services have been designated as Baby-Friendly Hospitals with 2 private hospitals and all MCHCs are at different stages in the programme. The efforts paid and actions taken by all teams and participants bit by bit moving the programme further ahead.

Being baby-friendly is a process and not an end. Understanding the substance of the Ten Steps will facilitate improvements beyond the letter of the Ten Steps to achieving the maximum benefits for mothers and babies through the BFHI<sup>6</sup>. To echo with the theme of WBW this year, “Closing the gap: Support breastfeeding for all”<sup>7</sup>, hoping that more health facilities would participate to bring the spirit of BFHI into actions for the best outcomes in health foundation of our next generation and our community.

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<sup>6</sup> Baby-Friendly E-News: The Spirit of Being Baby-friendly, BFHIHKA

<https://www.babyfriendly.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/BFHIHKA-Jul-Newsletter.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> World Breastfeeding Week 2024. World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action. <https://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>



**Appendix I: Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (BF)**  
**(Self-Appraisal by Hospitals)**

Survey year	Hospital %			
	2024			2023
	Public	Private	All	All
<b>1. Written BF Policy routinely communicated to all health care staff</b>				
1.1) With explicit written notice	100	91	95	90
1.2) BF policy displayed publicly	100	73	84	84
<b>2. Train all health care staff</b>				
2.1) Acquainted with BF policy	100	100	100	100
2.2) 20-hr training given to staff within six months of their arrival				
2.2a) % of O&G nursing staff	96	86	90	92
2.2b) % of Paediatric nursing staff	91	66(H:9)	78(H:17)	88(H:17)
2.3) 8-hr training given to staff within six months of their arrival				
2.3a) % of O&G doctors	93	56(H:6)	77(H:14)	80(H:13)
2.3b) % of Paediatric doctors	93	45(H:6)	72(H:14)	73(H:13)
<b>3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits &amp; management of BF</b>				
3.1) % of pregnant clients informed	95	99	97	95
3.2) Give group instruction on artificial feeding	0	9	5	5
<b>4. Help mothers initiate BF within half an hour of birth</b>				
4.1) Vaginal or Caesarean deliveries without general anaesthesia (skin-to-skin) - % of mothers who had skin-to-skin contact within 5 minutes and $\geq 1$ hour	51	47	49	50(H:18)
4.2) Caesarean deliveries with general anaesthesia (skin to skin when mother responsive) - % of mothers	22	46(H:10)	35(H:18)	36(H:17)



<b>5. Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infant</b>				
5.1) Offer breastfeeding assistance within six hours of delivery	100	100	100	100
5.2) Help mothers of babies in special care maintain lactation	100	100	100	100
<b>6. Give newborn only breast-milk, unless medically indicated</b>				
6.1) Given newborn infants no food or drink other than breast-milk	75	64	68	68
6.2) No free or low-cost supplies of breast-milk substitutes accepted	100	100	100	100
6.3) No promotion of infant foods or drinks other than breast-milk	100	100	100	100
<b>7. Practise rooming-in – allow mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day</b>				
7.1) Mothers and babies with normal vaginal delivery are rooming-in from birth	100	36	63	63
7.2) All mothers and babies stayed in the same room day and night	100	36	63	58
7.3) % of mothers and babies separated for medical reasons	40	4	19	20(H:17)
7.4) There is a nursery in postnatal ward for healthy infants	0	100	58	58
<b>8. Encourage responsive (or demand) breastfeeding</b>	100	36	63	63
<b>9. Give no artificial teats or pacifiers to BF infants</b>	100	82	90	90
<b>10. Coordinate discharge so that parents and their infants have timely access to ongoing support and care</b>				
10.1) Breastfeeding mothers are informed where they can access breastfeeding support in the community	100	100	100	100
10.2) Facilities coordinate with community services that provide breastfeeding/infant feeding support including				
10.2a) clinical management	100	100	100	100
10.2b) mother-to-mother support	50	73	63	63

Remarks:

Public hospitals with maternity unit: 8

Private hospitals with maternity unit: 11

All hospitals gave a response unless “H”, no. of hospitals providing information stated