

PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

INDICATOR #4 Breastfeeding

DEFINITION

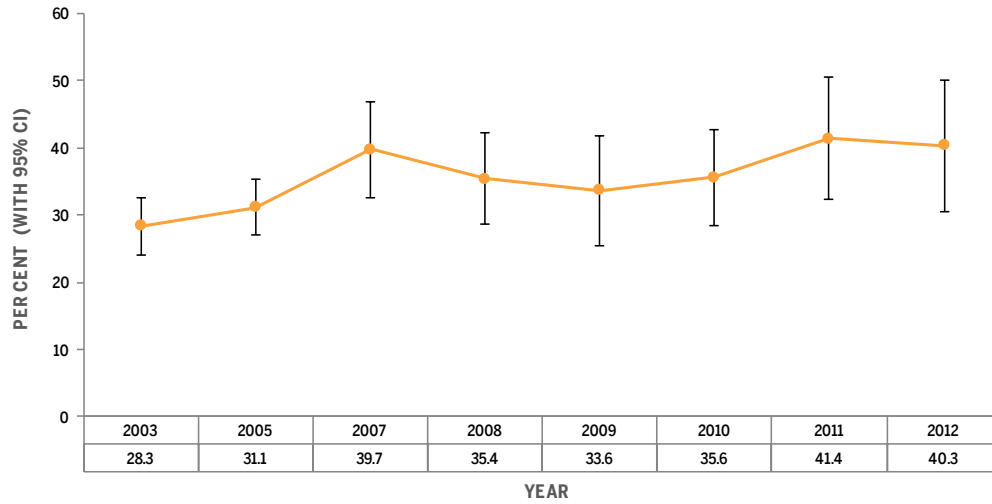
INDICATOR #4 — Percentage of infants who were exclusively breastfed for at least six months.

KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ The World Health Organization advocates breastfeeding as the best nutrition source for optimal infant growth and development, and recommends breastfeeding within the first hour after birth and **exclusive breastfeeding** until six months of age. This is based on the recognition that breast milk not only optimizes infant development and provides health benefits to infants and nursing mothers, but is also convenient and low cost.¹
- ▶ Exclusive breastfeeding is when an infant has received only breast milk since birth and has not received any other liquids or solids except any necessary medicines, oral rehydration solutions or drops/syrups containing vitamins, minerals and medicines.^{2,3} Breast milk can include expressed milk and donor milk.
- ▶ Breast milk is good for babies because it is the safest, healthiest, and easiest to digest food. Breast milk and breastfeeding support an infant's physical, emotional, and intellectual development.^{4,5} Breastfeeding promotes bonding between mother and baby. Breastfed babies have fewer infections—such as pneumonia, ear infections, and diarrhea—than babies who are not breastfed, and breastfed babies are less likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).⁶
- ▶ Breastfeeding also has important positive effects on a mother's health. Evidence from both high- and low-income countries supports the finding that breastfeeding lowers the risk of breast and ovarian cancer and diabetes in the mother.^{7,8} Research also shows that women who breastfeed have a decreased incidence of postpartum depression.^{8,9}
- ▶ Perinatal Services BC reports a **breastfeeding initiation**^{d,3} rate of 73 per cent in BC.
- ▶ Many factors contribute to whether an infant continues to receive only breast milk after initiation.¹⁰ As shown in Figure 4.1, according to the Canadian Community Health Survey, in BC, the rate of mothers who exclusively breastfed for the first six months increased from 28.3 per cent in 2003 to 40.3 per cent in 2012. Figure 4.2 shows that in 2011–12, BC had the highest percentage of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months in Canada.
- ▶ Figure 4.3 shows that there is a geographic difference of 20 per cent across the health authorities for the rate of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months: Vancouver Coastal Health had the highest rate at 49.0 per cent and Northern Health had the lowest at 29.0 per cent.

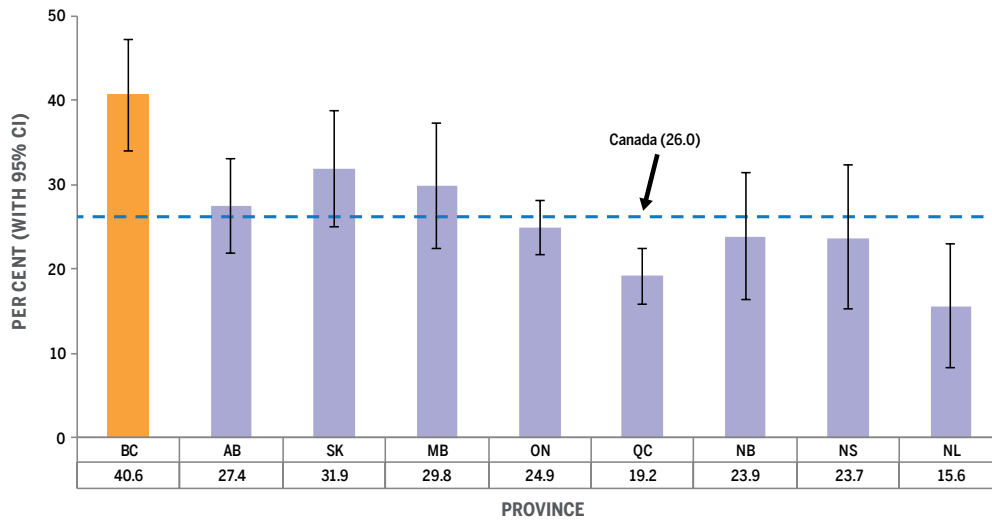
^d The data for breastfeeding initiation includes mothers who breastfed or tried to breastfeed their last child even if only for a short time.

FIG 4.1 Percentage of Mothers Who Exclusively Breastfed for the First Six Months, BC, 2003 to 2012



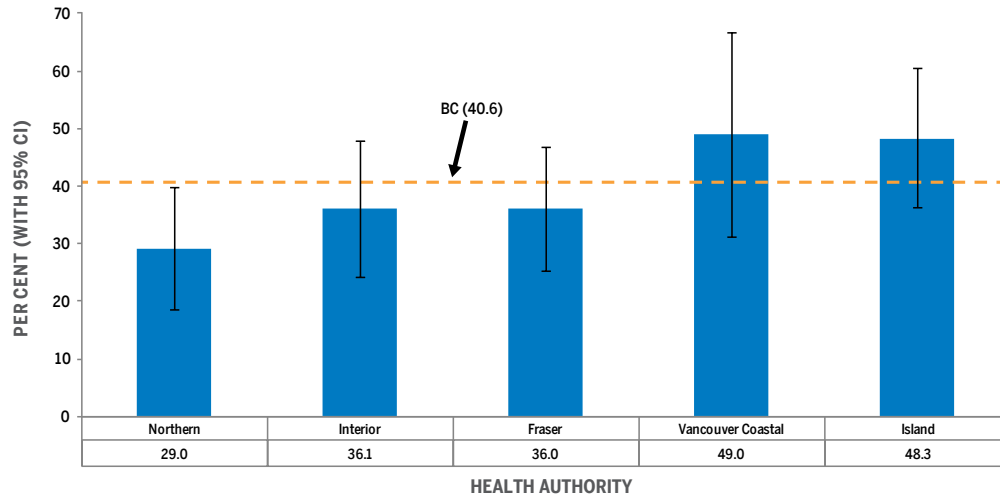
Notes: "Mothers" means women age 15-55 who gave birth in the last five years. "Exclusively breastfed" means the infant received only breast milk, without any additional liquid (even water) or solid food. Data for 2004 and 2006 were unavailable. See Appendix B for more information about this data source.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2003 to 2012. Table 105-0501, Health indicator profile, annual estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, CANSIM database. Prepared by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Team, BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2016.

FIG 4.2 Percentage of Mothers Who Exclusively Breastfed for the First Six Months, by Province, Canada, 2011-12



Notes: "Mothers" means women age 15-55 who gave birth in the last five years. "Exclusively breastfed" means the infant received only breast milk, without any additional liquid (even water) or solid food. Data are not available for PEI. See Appendix B for more information about this data source.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2011-12. Table 105-0501, Health indicator profile, two year period estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, CANSIM database. Prepared by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Team, BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2016.

FIG 4.3 Percentage of Mothers Who Exclusively Breastfed for the First Six Months, by Health Authority, BC, 2011-12



Notes: "Mothers" means women age 15-55 who gave birth in the last five years. "Exclusively breastfed" means the infant received only breast milk, without any additional liquid (even water) or solid food. Health authority is based on the residence of the mother. See Appendix B for more information about this data source.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2011-12. Table 105-0501, Health indicator profile, two year period estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, CANSIM database. Prepared by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Team, BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2016.

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