



## Family support key to breastfeeding

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Fathers and grandparents can provide much needed support to **breastfeeding** mothers, the HSE has said.

This week is National Breastfeeding Week and as part of the event, the HSE is highlighting the importance of family support. Research shows that a mother is much more likely to breastfeed if her partner or parent are supportive of her doing so.

In fact, a US study showed that strong approval of breastfeeding by the father is associated with a 98% breastfeeding incidence, compared to just 26% when the father is indifferent to the feeding choice.

"We know from research that support from family has a considerable impact on a mother's decision to continue breastfeeding. Often fathers, particularly first-time dads, feel that breastfeeding is not something they can be part of", explained Catherine Murphy of the HSE.

However, she explained, assisting with bathing and nappy changing, making meals and snacks and knowing where to get the right breastfeeding information if needed, can make a big difference to the mother, especially in the early months.

"Breastfeeding is not always easy, particularly if a mother is experiencing problems or feeling particularly tired and isolated, so encouragement from those closest to her is vital", Ms Murphy added.



Ireland continues to have one of the lowest rates of breastfeeding in Europe. Just 43% of women leaving hospital after the birth of their baby are breastfeeding, compared to rates of up to 99% in other countries.

This is despite the fact that breastfeeding offers numerous benefits to both mother and baby. Babies who are breastfed are less likely to suffer from illnesses such as respiratory infections, ear infections, eczema and diabetes. Mothers who breastfeed meanwhile are at a decreased risk of developing breast cancer, ovarian cancer and osteoporosis.

"With support and encouragement, women are more likely to feel confident about their ability to breastfeed. We invite pregnant women to make contact with their local breastfeeding support group before baby arrives in order to learn about breastfeeding. We encourage them to share what they learn with their partner and close family", said Mary

One of the main events of this week is a national breastfeeding conference, which will take place on October 6. The theme of the conference is 'Breastfeeding in a bottle feeding culture'. Guest speakers will include internationally renowned breastfeeding expert, Dr Jack Newman.

National Breastfeeding Week runs until October 7.

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[Back](#)

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