

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers about the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) in Ireland

What is the BFHI?

The BFHI is a global project of the World Health Organisation and UNICEF which recognises that implementing best practice in the maternity service is crucial to the success of programmes to promote breastfeeding.

The Initiative was launched in 1991 and by the end of 2000 more than 15,000 hospitals/maternity units worldwide, including over 300 in Europe, had been officially recognised as Baby Friendly. Ireland's BFHI commenced in April 1998.

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative can be viewed as a quality initiative implementing research based best practices. The successful implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding ensures that the hospital/unit supports and promotes informed parental choice through the provision of appropriate, accurate and unbiased information and discussions. The initiative involves health promoting practices and so is ideally linked with the objectives of the Health Promoting Hospitals Network, the designating authority for the BFHI in Ireland.

How does the BFHI process work?

Firstly, a maternity hospital or maternity unit within a general hospital, decides it wants to participate in the Initiative. They complete a self-appraisal of their practices and outline the areas they wish to work on. The self-appraisal form and the plan of action are returned to the BFHI office and a *Certificate of Membership* is awarded. The hospital/unit may decide to work on their own targets for a while or to apply for the next stage.

The second stage is an informal assessment by the BFHI team to assist the hospital in their progress and further development of targets. Completion of this stage results in awarding of a *Certificate of Commitment* recognising the hospital's commitment to supportive practices.

When the hospital is ready, they seek full external assessment of their practices according to the Global Criteria. If they fully meet this standard they are awarded *Baby Friendly Status*. A National Level Award is being considered for hospitals who have high standards but do not meet the criteria of a 75% breastfeeding rate for the international standard.

Hospitals/units are encouraged to network with other hospitals in the Initiative. Sharing of information through the HPH Newsletter, journals and other mailings, site visits, joint research projects, educational events and electronic communication are all welcomed. Hospitals/units are also encouraged to implement supportive practices to assist their own staff to continue breastfeeding after return to work.

Is there a fee to be a member of the BFHI?

There is no fee for membership of the BFHI. A fee is charged for on-site visits to hospitals for assessment or visits to discuss specific needs. Hospitals often find that increasing their breastfeeding rate reduces other costs such as the purchase of formula and reduced illness in babies.

What if our breastfeeding rates are very low and our practices need a lot of attention?

The BFHI is a process towards supportive practices as much as the achievement of awards. Membership of the Initiative indicates the interest to make changes. A hospital does not have to answer "yes" to all the self-appraisal questions to be a member.

Can a hospital receive a Baby Friendly award if paediatric and other wards are not implementing the Ten Steps?

The global BFHI focuses on maternity services. Neonatal units are included in the assessment if they are part of the maternity services. In Ireland, paediatric wards have a separate assessment programme though hospitals are encouraged to have linked policies and projects. The entire hospital should conform to the BFHI goal of no acceptance of free and low cost supplies of breastmilk substitutes.

What about mothers who do not want to breastfeed?

Parents have the right to decide how to feed and care for their babies. Hospitals and staff have the responsibility to encourage best practice and to ensure parents are given accurate, unbiased and appropriate information to allow them to make an informed choice. Hospitals will not be penalised at assessment if individual mothers indicate they have made informed choices which are not in accordance with the Ten Steps.

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative - a healthy start for babies and mothers

The HPH Network is the Irish co-ordinating body for the WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative

Step Two says "train all staff"? What does this mean?

All staff in contact with pregnant and breastfeeding women and their children should be aware of how they can support breastfeeding and the hospital policies. This includes nurses, midwives, doctors, dietitians, physiotherapists, pharmacists, administrative and ancillary staff. Staff with direct responsibility for assisting breastfeeding should have training in breastfeeding management. Staff without this training should refer mothers to trained staff. It is recommended that some staff have further specialised knowledge of breastfeeding in order to act as a resource to other staff. The BFHI in Ireland does not provide training at this time. We can discuss your training needs and refer you to sources of training expertise.

Where can we get more information on implementing supportive practices?

Each hospital that is a member of the Initiative receives regular mailings of information. *BFHI Link*, the newsletter of the BFHI in Ireland. If you need information on a specific practice, write to the BFHI Co-ordinator.

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How do we contact the BFHI?

The BFHI in Ireland is a project within the Irish Network of Health Promoting Hospitals. It can be contacted c/o James Connolly Memorial Hospital, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 or bfhi@iol.ie The BFHI Co-ordinator works part-time, so is best contacted in writing rather than by phone.

What does the National Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative co-ordinator and advisory committee do?

The advisory committee is a multi-disciplinary group including midwives, lactation consultants, doctors, dietitians, and mother to mother support group counsellors, from a variety of work settings including health promotion, hospitals, community, education and training. All areas of the country are represented. The committee's role is to facilitate implementation of the BFHI *process* including identifying hospitals that are ready for assessment, organising assessment and designating status. The BFHI committee is not charged with implementing or monitoring other aspects of the recommendations of the National Breastfeeding Policy.

The co-ordinator of the BFHI drafts Irish adaptations of international BFHI materials, compiles reports, highlights BFHI related resources, acts as a link to BFHI internationally and generally co-ordinates the BFHI in Ireland. The co-ordinator is employed for a few days a month funded by the Irish Network of Health Promoting Hospitals (HPH) The secretariat services of the BFHI are provided by the HPH.

Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding

First published in a joint WHO/UNICEF statement in 1989 -

Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding : the special role of the maternity services.

Every facility providing maternity services and care for newborn infants should:

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff.
2. Train all health care staff in skills necessary to implement this policy.
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding.
4. Help mothers to initiate breastfeeding within a half-hour of birth.
5. Show mothers how to breastfeed, and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infants.
6. Give newborn infants no food or drink other than breast milk, unless *medically* indicated.
7. Practise rooming-in - allow mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day.
8. Encourage breastfeeding on demand.
9. Give no artificial teats or pacifiers to breastfeeding infants.
10. Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer mothers to them on discharge from the hospital or clinic.

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