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**NEW DATA SHOW U.S. BREASTFEEDING RATES AT ALL-TIME  
RECORDED HIGH**

*- But More Support and Programs Needed to Address Lagging Rates for  
Working Mothers and WIC Participants -*

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Nov. 25, 2003 – U.S. breastfeeding rates have reached their highest recorded levels, according to new data from Abbott Laboratories' Ross Products Division, which has tracked breastfeeding trends since 1954. Abbott's ongoing mail survey of infant feeding trends, the largest of its kind, shows that 70.1 percent of mothers now initiate breastfeeding in the hospital – up from 54.2 percent a decade ago. Additionally, the data show that 33.2 percent of mothers still are breastfeeding when their babies reach six months of age – up from 18.9 percent in 1992.

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Despite the continued rise in breastfeeding rates overall, the survey reveals two key areas in which breastfeeding rates continue to lag. Rates are significantly lower at six months for women who work outside the home. Similarly, women who participate in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are less likely to breastfeed both in-hospital and at six months.

Women who work full-time start breastfeeding at virtually the same rate as all mothers – 69.0 percent compared to 70.1 percent. But by six months, breastfeeding rates for full-time working mothers have dropped approximately 25 percent below those of mothers who do not work outside the home.

The disparity is even greater for women participating in the WIC program – regardless of their working status. Breastfeeding rates among WIC participants are at record highs – 58.8 percent initiation and 22.1 percent at six months – but they still lag 20 percentage points behind rates for non-WIC participants. This lag holds true even when accounting for differences in education, ethnicity, geography, and mother's age.

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"Abbott's Ross Products Division is committed to promoting optimal nutrition for babies," said Susan May, MD, FAAP, director of medical communications at Ross Products Division and clinical associate professor of pediatrics at The Ohio State University. "While the new data are terrific news for the health of mothers and babies, our nation clearly must do more to provide breastfeeding support for working mothers and mothers participating in the WIC program."

The Ross Products Division survey, known as the *Ross Mothers Survey* (RMS), is one of the most comprehensive, accurate and widely used data sets for tracking U.S. infant feeding trends. The RMS data were published in the peer-reviewed medical journal, *Pediatrics*, in December 2002. The survey also serves as the data baseline and monitoring source for the Department of Health and Human Services' *Healthy People 2010* breastfeeding goals.

"The data show that we are making strides toward achieving the *Healthy People 2010* goal of 75 percent breastfeeding initiation in the hospital and 50 percent at six months," May said.

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While the data indicate progress, more can be done to increase breastfeeding rates, especially among those groups in which rates are the lowest. For example, Abbott's Ross Products Division endorses an increase in funding for positive support programs that have been proven to increase breastfeeding rates among WIC participants.

To increase breastfeeding rates among working mothers, Abbott's Ross Products Division will introduce in early 2004 a comprehensive, turnkey workplace lactation support program called *Business Backs Breastfeeding*. The *Business Backs Breastfeeding* kit will be distributed through the Ross Products Division's sales force and corporate contacts, as well as through health care professionals. The kit will be available free of charge to businesses, health care organizations and associations, as well as government agencies and offices. Ross also will work with human resource professionals and chief executive officers to encourage them to implement the program in their workplaces.

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The program is based upon models that have been tested in a variety of workplace settings and have proven to increase breastfeeding by as much as 30 percentage points. The kit was developed with review and input from the Ross Breastfeeding Advisory Board, a group of independent experts on infant nutrition, breastfeeding, and maternal health who provide ongoing guidance for Ross' efforts to promote breastfeeding education, training, resources and support.

"The Ross workplace initiative will bring to employers the kind of workplace program women need to continue breastfeeding after returning to work," said nutrition consultant Bridget Swinney, M.S., R.D., author of *Eating Expectantly* and *Healthy Food for Healthy Kids*, and a member of the Ross Breastfeeding Advisory Board. "We want to ensure that women who are working to help support their families financially can at the same time provide their infants with the best form of infant nutrition – breast milk."

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**Abbott's Ross Products Division: A Leader in Infant Nutrition**

Abbott's Ross Products Division supports optimal infant nutrition. Along with the American Academy of Pediatrics and other health care professionals, Abbott's Ross Products Division promotes breastfeeding as the best source of infant nutrition. If a mother cannot or chooses not to breastfeed or wishes to supplement breastfeeding, then an iron fortified infant formula is recommended. The goal of Abbott's Ross Products Division is to have its formulas perform as close as possible to the gold standard of breast milk.

Abbott's Ross Products Division offers a broad line of infant formula products, including Similac® Advance® With Iron and Isomil® Advance® – which are supplemented with DHA and ARA and designed to meet the needs of both formula feeding and supplementing mothers. For more information about Ross Products, visit [www.ross.com](http://www.ross.com).

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