UK ADOPTS NEW GROWTH CHARTS BASED ON BREAST-FED BABIES

New growth charts launched for National Breastfeeding Awareness Week

All newborn babies and children up to four years old will have their growth measurements plotted on new charts from this week. The launch of the charts, which have been developed for the Department of Health by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, based on the World Health Organisation’s work, coincides with National Breastfeeding Awareness Week (10 – 16 May) and replaces current measures which are based predominately on babies fed with formula milk.

Research shows that breast-fed babies tend to gain weight at a healthier pace and are less likely to become obese in later life. The new charts will play an important role in establishing breastfeeding as the norm and will be included in the Personal Child Health Records, which parents of every newborn are given. They will help parents and healthcare professionals identify children at early risk of obesity and provide important reassurance for parents of breast-fed babies, who are likely to gain weight more slowly.

The new charts include parent-friendly instructions and a chart specifically for premature babies. As babies can lose and gain weight at different rates during birth and two weeks, it is recommended that they are not measured during this time. The charts also help make more reliable predictions of a child’s adult height.

Dr Sheila Shribman, National Clinical Director for Children, Young People and Maternity at the Department of Health said,

"Breastfeeding is the best form of nutrition for infants. It gives health benefits for both the baby and the mother - even after they are no longer breastfeeding. It protects against stomach bugs and chest infections, provides perfect nutrition for the first six months, and reduces the likelihood of becoming obese in later childhood."
"The new UK-WHO growth charts will not only provide more accurate measurements for infant growth of breastfed babies, but will also help healthcare professionals and parents to identify early signs of overweight or obesity and provide support."

Professor Terence Stephenson, President of Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said:

"The new charts have given us the opportunity to give growth charts a complete facelift and for the first time, position breastfeeding as ‘the norm’. We hope they will be the stimulus for healthcare professionals to explain to women best practice for healthy growth and in turn, encourage more women to breastfeed their child."

Notes to Editors
For media enquiries only please contact the Department of Health newsdesk on 020 7210 5221

The charts and supporting educational materials can viewed on www.rcpch.ac.uk.

The new growth charts covering newborns to 4 year olds replace the current UK90 charts and are included in the newly updated Personal Child Health Record, which is given to all new parents. Other features of the revised Personal Child Health Record include information on the Healthy Child Programme and information on new one year and two to two and a half year reviews, as well as on breast-feeding support services.

The Department of Health recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months (26 weeks) of an infant’s life, as breast milk provides all the nutrients a baby needs at this time. Breastfeeding (and/or breastmilk substitutes, if used) should continue beyond the first six months along with appropriate types and amounts of solid foods.
Research indicates breastmilk helps protect babies from infection and diseases such as gastro-intestinal infections, ear infections, urine infections, eczema and obesity in later childhood. *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Cross-Government Strategy for England* aims to reverse the rise in childhood obesity, and breastfeeding plays an integral role in this. Breastfeeding also provides health benefits for mothers. It can help them to return to pre-pregnancy weight and can reduce the risk of ovarian cancer and breast cancer later in life.

In England, 78% of mothers initiate breastfeeding and only 22% are still breastfeeding at 6 months. Initiation rates for many other European countries are much higher: Norway: 99%; Denmark: 98%; Sweden: 97.7%; Switzerland: 94%; Austria: 93%; Italy: 91%; Spain: 84.2%, whilst France, Ireland and Germany have lower rates than England Germany: 77.8%; France: 69%; Ireland: 53%.

In addition to the support offered by healthcare professionals, the Department of Health provides the National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212, which mums can call and speak to a trained breastfeeding volunteer in their local area. The DH also provides a free DVD ‘From bump to breastfeeding – following real mothers’ stories to find out how’, available to all pregnant women and distributed by midwives and health visitors. For more information visit [www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk](http://www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk)

The growth charts form part of the Department of Health’s long term commitment to increasing breastfeeding rates in England. Last year the Department of Health announced £4 million extra funding to help support hospitals in disadvantaged areas to achieve Unicef Baby-Friendly Status, a set of best practice standards for maternity units and community services on improving practice to promote, protect and support breastfeeding.

For more information on the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) visit [www.rcpch.ac.uk](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk)