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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN MARION COUNTY CELEBRATES NATIONAL BREASTFEEDING MONTH



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OCALA, Fla.—The Florida Department of Health in Marion County is celebrating National Breastfeeding Month this August. The department will host multiple opportunities for individuals to learn more about breastfeeding or solve breastfeeding issues starting at the beginning of August.

- Aug. 1, 3 and 4, 2017: Mothers can receive help and advice from other mothers who have successfully breastfed from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 to 3:30 p.m. at the department's Ocala location (1801 SE 32nd Ave.) The Marion County Women Infants and Children (WIC) program's breastfeeding peer counselors will be on hand to share breastfeeding information and lessons learned.
- Aug. 2, 2017: International Board Certified Lactation Consultant Jennifer Ferrarra, will speak from 10 to 11 a.m. at the department's Ocala location on how to be successful with breastfeeding goals. Participants can enjoy snacks and a child play group, and parents will have the opportunity to meet with other parents and learn breastfeeding best practices.

The department is working to promote breastfeeding as a vital health activity, and encourages breastfeeding-friendly hospitals, child care facilities, workplaces and communities. This year's breastfeeding month theme—Charting the Course Together—focuses on using data and measurement to build and reinforce the connections between breastfeeding and a broad spectrum of other health topics and initiatives.

"The data shows us how much of a positive impact breastfeeding has on a child's and mother's health," said Florida Department of Health in Marion County Health Officer Erin Hess. "It's important to make our community as breastfeeding-friendly as possible. This could be a vital first step in combatting some of the challenging health trends our community's families face."

Research shows:

- Breastfed infants have a reduced risk of infections, asthma, obesity and SIDS compared with formula-fed infants;

- Mothers who breastfeed have a reduced risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer and postpartum depression compared to mothers who don't breastfeed; and
- It's estimated that \$13 billion would be saved per year if 90 percent of U.S. infants were breastfed exclusively for six months.

To reach the goal of exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months, mothers need supportive work policies, child care at or near the workplace, and private facilities for expressing and storing breastmilk. It takes time and practice to learn how to breastfeed, both for mother and baby, and to establish a good milk supply.

Marion County's WIC program offers resources and staff to help breastfeeding mothers. Marion WIC has certified lactation consultants and breastfeeding peer counselors available to assist mothers. The trained peer counselors are chosen from the same socioeconomic and ethnic groups as WIC clients and have successfully breastfed their own babies. Breastfeeding peer counselors provide mother-to-mother basic breastfeeding education and support to pregnant and breastfeeding moms.

Healthiest Weight Florida also has a variety of tools available for mothers, families, employers, childcare facilities, hospitals and health care professionals. Visit <http://www.healthiestweightflorida.com/activities/breastfeeding.html> for more information.

As part of the department's Healthiest Weight Florida initiative, the Baby Steps to Baby Friendly project focuses on increasing breastfeeding initiation and duration among Florida women. Baby Steps to Baby Friendly supports hospitals wishing to improve and enhance maternity care practices related to breastfeeding, including achieving the 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, developed by the World Health Organization. The department is currently partnered with 57 hospitals across the state, and 13 hospitals have already earned their Baby Friendly designation, with more expected this year. To learn more about Baby Steps to Baby Friendly, visit <http://www.healthiestweightflorida.com/activities/baby-steps.html>.

For more information about the Florida WIC program, call 1-800-342-3556 or visit www.FloridaWIC.org. To learn more about National Breastfeeding Month and the benefits of breastfeeding visit www.usbreastfeeding.org, www.Illi.org or www.flbreastfeeding.org.

About the Florida Department of Health

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