

# Breastfeeding May Reduce Child's Risk of Asthma More Than 20%

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By Martha Kerr

BERLIN (Reuters Health) Oct 09 - Breastfeeding reduces risk of childhood wheeze, whether related to viral infections or multiple triggers, for the first 3 years of life, investigators announced here at the 18th Annual Congress of the European Respiratory Society.

The findings, from a community-based cohort study of British children, also indicate that mothers with asthma who breastfeed do not increase their child's risk of asthma.

Dr. Claudia E. Kuehni of the University of Bern, Switzerland, and colleagues analyzed data from surveys of mothers of 8,700 children in the county of Leicestershire, UK, initially aged 1-4 years in 1998 and followed up in 2001 and 2003.

Breastfeeding practice was assessed during the first questionnaire and the respiratory status of the children was assessed at each survey. Dr. Kuehni's team analyzed data on 4,229 children at 1 year of age, 5,214 children between 3-5 years and 4,071 children between 6-8 years of age.

Dr. Kuehni's team found that 42% of children were not breastfed, while 28% were breastfed for 1-3 months, 12% for 3-6 months, and 18% for more than 6 months.

Breastfeeding for more than 6 months was associated with a reduced risk of wheeze at age 1, with an odds ratio of 0.65, compared with children who were not breastfed. At age 3-5 years, the odds ratio was 0.75. By age 6-8 years, however, there was no reduction in risk.

"The population-attributable risk fraction of current wheeze caused by lack of breastfeeding was calculated as 22% and 12% for wheeze at the age of 1 and 3-5 years, respectively," the team reports in their abstract.

"We found no effect modification by maternal asthma or ethnic group," Dr. Kuehni told the Congress.

Some studies have indicated that asthmatic mothers who breastfeed may have offspring with an increased risk of early asthma symptoms, Dr. Kuehni said in an interview before her presentation.

"Importantly," she said, this study "showed no evidence for a detrimental effect of breastfeeding in children of asthmatic mothers."