



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department To Receive WIC Breastfeeding Performance Bonus

USDA Award to be presented at Oct. 17 Vermont Breastfeeding Symposium

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Media Contact: Communication Office
Vermont Department of Health
802-863-7281

BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health will receive a \$308,292 award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service for maintaining one of the nation's highest breastfeeding rates among WIC recipients during Fiscal Year 2011.

USDA Northeast Regional Administrator James Arena-Derosa will present the award at the Vermont Breastfeeding symposium "*Changing the Landscape for Breastfeeding in Our Communities*" on Monday, Oct. 17 at the Health Department in Burlington (Room 2B, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.).

No more than 15 state agencies that demonstrate the highest rate or greatest improvement in proportion of breastfed infants can receive the award. WIC mothers in Vermont initiated breastfeeding at a rate of 77.7 percent, well above the national average of 65.4 percent.

"WIC staff and partners have worked together over many years to change Vermont's breastfeeding culture, and as a result breastfeeding mothers now have more community supports than mothers had years ago," said the Health Department's WIC Program Director Donna Bister. "This bonus rewards our progress and provides extra resources to enhance our efforts."

WIC, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, is a public health program that improves health in lower income families. In addition to breastfeeding services, Vermont WIC provides nutrition counseling, healthy foods, and referrals to other important preventive health services. WIC serves 16,000 people a month in Vermont.

Vermont women who exclusively breastfeed their babies are eligible for the largest supplemental food benefit offered by the Health Department through the WIC program. WIC provides fully breastfeeding mothers with an extra \$10 a month to spend on fruits and vegetables above and beyond the supplemental foods already provided for free.

"We have worked hard to provide incentives and encourage new mothers to provide the healthiest possible start for their baby, and this award is a tribute to all Vermont mothers who make the decision to breast feed," said Breena Holmes, MD, maternal and child health director. "Breast milk is good for a baby's developing brain and the early feedings have a strong protective effect against lower respiratory tract infections, middle ear infections, eczema and childhood obesity."

The featured speaker at breastfeeding symposium event will be Melissa Bartick, MD, an internal medicine physician who chairs the Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition.

For more information on the WIC changes, please visit: <http://www.healthvermont.gov>.

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Vermont Department of Health | 108 Cherry Street | Burlington, VT 05402
Voice: 802-863-7200 | In Vermont 800-464-4343 | Fax: 802-865-7754 | TTY/TDD: Dial 711 first
Health Care Provider Infectious Disease Reporting: 802-863-7240 or 800-640-4374
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