VER 57,000 users have searched our Ask Expert section of the HSE website breastfeeding.ie to find answers to their questions about breastfeeding since the on-line breastfeeding support service was launched in May 2015. Over 1,250 mothers or mothers-to-be have been consulted directly with the lactation consultants. The breastfeeding experts, providing the information to members of the public are International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC).

The questions to the online support service were varied and covered a number of topics, including queries from pregnant women thinking about breastfeeding, queries from new mums coping with issues such as night feeds and experiencing challenges such as blocked ducts. Other mums had questions about issues including milk supply, expressing breast milk and weaning. Breastfeeding.ie is a valuable resource for women who are thinking of breastfeeding, women who are breastfeeding and staff who support them (staff resources are available online). If you or any member of your family is thinking of breastfeeding give them some support by sharing www.breastfeeding.ie with them.

FEEDBACK

Feedback about the Ask the Expert service is very positive and was gathered as part of an online survey. The vast majority of users felt that they received practical information and support (95%) and also that the service helped solve their query (92%). The online survey carried out among those using the service also found that:

• Some 71% of mums in the postnatal age group
• Some 58% were first-time breastfeeding mothers
• Mothers heard about the service through online (64%), healthcare professionals (24%) and radio advertising (16%).
• Mothers found the site easy to use (80%) and navigate (86%).
• Some 80% would recommend the site to a family member or friend.

HEALTH BENEFITS

In Ireland, 50% of mothers are breastfeeding their babies on discharge from maternity hospital. The health benefits from breastfeeding for both baby and mother increase the longer breastfeeding continues. In the first few days and weeks at home, many mothers face challenges which often prompt them to stop breastfeeding unnecessarily.

SUPPORT

HSE National breastfeeding co-ordinator Siobhan Hourigan said: “The HSE breastfeeding online support service via www.breastfeeding.ie was launched in May 2015 to support mothers and families. Ask the Expert Lactation Consultants provide breastfeeding information, advice and support in response to email queries. The focus is on assisting mothers with information and enabling them to overcome challenges they may be experiencing. The on-line support is non-judgemental, respecting mother’s decisions and encouraging and supporting them. Mothers are also directed to local health services and breastfeeding support groups, as appropriate.”

Siobhan added: “The evidence in relation to breastfeeding and health is now stronger than ever and the potential for improved health outcomes for women and children in Ireland is substantial. We must work collectively to prioritise work to promote, support and protect breastfeeding. This will include training and enhancing the skills of our staff to support more mothers to start and continue to breastfeed, implementing evidence based breastfeeding support groups, as appropriate.”

Breastfeeding.ie: YOU ASKED, WE ANSWERED

COMMENTS FROM THE PEOPLE USING THE SERVICE INCLUDED:

“I really am so grateful for your supportive reply. I may not have tried it but not been for your words of encouragement!”

“I was a detailed answer and very well written and made me feel much better about my situation. I felt that three was a time and a lot of advice presented in my answer.”

“Thanks for all your advice. He’s doing so well I don’t want to give up now after getting this far.”

“I got some really good info from you recently. Your advice really worked! Thanks a million. Now I’ve another question…”

ABOVE LEFT: Cork Group pictured are Baby Gillian and Mum Fran O’Sullivan. PICTURE NICK BRADSHAW
ABOVE RIGHT: A mother breastfeeds her newborn son in Cork University Hospital. A number of videos have been added to the website breastfeeding.ie to help new mothers.

Breastfeeding supports that meet mother’s individual needs from the antenatal period throughout the postnatal period and beyond.”

The database of questions and answers on the website is continually updated. Mothers and other site users can pose their question to the site, and a range of similar queries and Ask the Expert responses are provided. The user also has the option to send an email query directly to the Ask the Expert Lactation Consultants. The performance of the service is therefore measured through website statistics and web pages visited as well as emails sent directly to the Ask the Expert Lactation Consultants.”

The service is promoted as part of the Every Breastfeed Makes a Difference campaign.

LAUNCH OF BREASTFEEDING VIDEOS

A Suite of breastfeeding videos will be launched at the National Breastfeeding Week 2016. The videos provide guidance for mothers on topics like positioning, and attaching the baby to the breast, and are an ideal aid for the early days. The suite includes videos of Irish mums sharing their experiences, tips and supports. The videos can be accessed at www.breastfeeding.ie.