

28 October 2020

## **Response to Healthwatch Derbyshire engagement on breastfeeding experiences during Covid-19**

I am writing on behalf of the Derby City and Derbyshire County Breastfeeding Strategic Group, in response to the recent Healthwatch engagement on experiences of breastfeeding during Covid-19.

The Breastfeeding Strategic Group is a group of organisations working together to support breastfeeding in Derbyshire. Over the last few months we have worked with Healthwatch to help us understand what it has felt like to breastfeed during the pandemic, and we will continue to reach out and seek people's views.

Thank you for sharing your story with us. We appreciate your honesty.

Local services have had to respond to the pandemic in many ways, and some changes have had to be made very quickly to help keep people safe and to support other areas of the NHS at a difficult time. This has clearly affected parent's experiences in many different ways. We would like to assure you that we will use your feedback to reflect, and will use this learning to inform our future actions.

Enclosed are responses from the organisations responsible for providing breastfeeding support and advice in Derbyshire, and details of how to access help and support.

Yours sincerely



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Public Health Lead

On behalf of the Derby City and Derbyshire County Breastfeeding Strategic Group

# Responses to Healthwatch engagement from organisations providing breastfeeding support in Derbyshire

## Derbyshire Community Health Services (DCHS) Response

**Virtual Support** – Many parents have had to adapt to changing and uncertain circumstances as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic socially distancing measures that has resulted in a reduction of in-person support from professionals. In DCHS we have tried to continue to deliver an accessible service via our single point of access (SPA) which has been promoted at all contacts by Health Visitors and also through our social media platforms. The calls into the SPA are all handled by experienced Health Visitors. They are able to offer the same support virtually to parents when they call for support around infant feeding and will request further intervention from the Health Visitors in the localities across the county if they assess the family need more support. To make virtual calls more personal and sensitive to meet needs of parents, DCHS Health visitors have the facility to contact parents via videoconferencing by using the Airmid App when this is appropriate and acceptable to parents which has proved very popular with parents.

The volunteer groups (managed by the Breastfeeding Network) are an integral part of this service and contracted by DCHS, they have also sustained their service throughout the pandemic and continue to develop to meet the needs of breast feeding mothers (more information can be found via [www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/Derbyshire](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/Derbyshire)).

The Healthy Family Peer Support Workers who deliver infant feeding and infant nutrition peer support can be accessed via our Live Chat group which is available week days from 9:30 -12:00 (more information can be found via <http://www.derbyshirehealthyfamily.org.uk>).

**Community Support** – Our service delivery and restoration plans are being driven by national and local priorities during the covid-19 period, working in a coordinated way with our health and care system partners. It is a complex process being carried out in a number of phases, though our number one priority is to maintain safe delivery of healthcare services for both patients and staff, minimising the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

Based on national recommendation and service prioritisation our Health visitors continued to provide a service to children and families which included virtual antenatal contacts and face to face/home visits for the new birth visit. The Health visitors have delivered care in the home if additional need of support has been identified that cannot easily be resolved virtually such as growth review.

The 6-8 week contact was restored as a face to face contact within months, this was in response to the recognition of the needs of parents with a new baby and provides support for infant feeding and any other concerns with additional contacts provided as needed.

**Weighing** – Our service response during the pandemic with the aim of providing safe delivery of care for both families and staff was being driven by national and local priorities. This resulted in significant changes to how we delivered care and meant that public open weighing clinics had to be suspended, however we do understand parents need to feel reassured their child is growing normally.

The Government has supported the weighing and measuring of infants at specific times during their first two years of life. Health Visitors will continue to provide this service at the birth visit the 6 to 8 week contact at one year and at the two year check. Health Visitors will continue to assess the need for additional growth measurements where a parent is concerned about their child's growth.

**Mental Health** - Being a parent is challenging at the best of times but the covid-19 pandemic measures of isolation and social distancing have intensified this and affected parents and the services that support them in a diverse way.

We are aware that at any time during the peri-natal period that 10-20% of mothers are affected with low mood and poor mental health and we thank you for sharing your feeding stories and letting us know what the impact has been on your mental and emotional health during the lock down.

Health Visitors are nurses and trained to assess physical and emotional health and give the opportunity to discuss feelings at each contact and agree a package of support tailored to meet individual needs. We have now reinstated the 6 to 8 week contact and we have contacted every parent who missed this contact during the lock down to ensure that they receive appropriate support

**Positives** - mothers' comments highlighted how valuable and supportive role of the HV was also well appreciated. First time mothers particularly commented on how essential these roles were in successfully breastfeeding and achieving good mental health as a result. DCHS is making improvements to the Health Visiting website to provide parents with comprehensive guidance and support on infant feeding for parents and their families.

### **Breastfeeding Network Derbyshire (BFN) Response**

**Virtual Support**- Breastfeeding Network Derbyshire is proud to have been able to offer breastfeeding families in Derbyshire virtual breastfeeding support throughout the pandemic. Our volunteer led peer support groups will continue to do so in coming months. We will be working with our DCHS colleagues and partners to ensure more parents know where to find this service. We will also be exploring how we can refine the service we offer virtually to support families in different ways.

### **Chesterfield Royal Hospital Response**

**Support in Hospital** - We have appointed 11 new maternity support workers, 8 of these will be in hospital to support mothers with feeding their babies. They started on 21/9/20 and will provide 24 hour support. This is additional support to our existing staffing establishment.

We have had a successful recruitment process and have increased the number of midwives taking up posts both in hospital and community services. The midwives are now all coming into posts over the course of the next 2 months.

The tongue tie service was originally suspended in the maxillo facial department but has now been restored.

**Virtual Support** - Community midwives and maternity support workers are providing some telephone consultations to support mothers with feeding

**Community Support** - The number of midwifery visits has been reduced during the pandemic and there are restoration plans in place to review and evaluate the service going forward. 3 additional maternity support workers have been appointed to work alongside the midwifery team in the community.

**Weighing** - The routine weighing of healthy term babies on day 3 in community has been suspended during covid. The policy is currently under review.

## **Infant Feeding Team (Part of the 0-19's Health Visiting Service - Derby City)**

**Support in Hospital-** With it being highlighted that new Mums sometimes do not know who to contact we are looking at what changes can be made to promote the infant feeding team more effectively and give new Mums the confidence to contact the team when feeding support is needed.

**Virtual Support-** When lockdown was first brought in all face to face contacts were discontinued and support continued via telephone only. It was quickly identified that this was not enough for Mums in the community and so we looked at other ways of providing support, whilst trying to keep families and staff safe. 'Attend Anywhere' was brought in quickly to enable us to provide video consultations for breastfeeding mothers and although not a replacement for face to face support allowed us to identify and problem solve feeding issues more effectively than just over the phone.

The Infant Feeding Team in Derby City (Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust) will continue to run a virtual breastfeeding club weekly through NHS Attend Anywhere. Any Mum breastfeeding or offering any expressed breastmilk is welcome to attend on a 'drop in' basis to gain support from an Infant Feeding Practitioner and peer support from other breastfeeding mothers. To obtain the link for the group families can contact the Infant Feeding Team on 0300 1234586 option 3.

Virtual Antenatal 'Feeding Your Baby' sessions continue to be facilitated fortnightly by the Infant Feeding Team. This is an opportunity for any expectant parents, living in Derby, to join one of our live, virtual antenatal feeding My Baby group sessions to find out how to recognise baby's feeding cues, how to know baby is getting enough milk and how responsive feeding can help your baby's brain to develop. Parents can book onto these sessions via the contact number 0300 1234586 option 3. These sessions are being promoted through health visitors, midwives and the Derby Childrens Health Facebook pages to try to ensure that in future parents are better informed on where to access local, professional support.

Although we recognise that virtual support does not replace face to face support it will enable the team to carry on supporting parents in the event of a future outbreak or lockdown.

**Community Support -** The Infant Feeding Team have continued to take referrals from midwives, health visitors and parents during lockdown. Support is provided to parents through telephone calls, video calls and face to face contact when needed. One to one clinic appointments are provided when necessary and home visits have recently been recommenced to offer support in the home.

We recognise that the most effective support for families who have feeding concerns is that face to face support within the home and apologise that this was not able to continue at the beginning of lockdown. Risk assessments are now in place to try to continue these in the safest possible way but in the event of a future lockdown there is a chance that we may have to move back to clinic only appointments to keep staff and families safe.

**Weighing -** Appointment only clinics have been running in Derby city when it has been felt there is a clinical need for baby's weight to be checked- these appointments can be booked through the family's health visitor. Baby's will continue to be offered a weight review at their infant feeding support clinic appointment if it is felt this is required.

**Mental Health -** We recognise the impact that a mothers' breastfeeding journey can have on her mental health and will look at changes that can be made so that more new Mums are provided with effective feeding support when it's needed most.

**Positives** - The lockdown has enabled us to develop new ways of working very quickly, the infant feeding team's capacity in Derby was initially reduced but the needs of new mothers was quickly identified and the team brought back to full capacity.

### **Ripplez CIC Response - (Provider of Family Nursing Services in Derbyshire County and Community Parent Programme in Derby city and parts of Derbyshire)**

**Support in Hospital:** Unfortunately, despite their passion for supporting women during labour and birth, Ripplez volunteer peer supporters were unable to provide birth support at the hospital during lockdown. Support offered will adapt according to changes to the pandemic situation and guidance from the hospital.

**Virtual Support:** During COVID lockdown, our Family Nurses were unable to see their mothers and babies as often as they would normally and so we provided a mixture of face to face home visiting and virtual support through one to one and group contacts. We fully appreciate how difficult it was for some mothers not to be able to see their nurse face to face and, although we would have liked to offer virtual contacts as an alternative, we were aware that some platforms such as zoom are not secure. The volunteer peer support service set-up an online community for ante-natal mothers and new mothers in partnership with UHDB midwives to provide support and evidence based information. Mothers were able to access support with breastfeeding and other health aspects and have given very positive feedback about the support received.

**Community Support:** Our community parent programme has continued to support new mothers at weekly online coffee morning sessions throughout COVID lockdown.

**Weighing:** Family Nurses prioritised home visiting for vulnerable mothers and babies based on need and according to government guidelines during the COVID pandemic. We were sorry that we were unable to provide support to some breastfeeding mothers, and this may have resulted in concerns about their baby's weight gain, because we needed to comply with home visiting restrictions.

**Mental Health:** We were sorry to hear that some mothers experienced poor mental health because our Family Nurses weren't able to visit, leaving mothers feeling isolated.

**Positives:** Ripplez has had some recent feedback from breastfeeding mothers which told us that spending the early weeks at home with their babies was helpful to building positive attachment and getting breastfeeding off to a good start. Some mothers told us that because they had received ante-natal preparation and education from their Family Nurse they knew how to position and attach their baby for breastfeeding and they felt confident to do so. Some mothers and babies also had problems, such as tongue-tie, that the Family Nurse helped them to resolve.

## **University Hospital of Derby and Burton NHS FT Feedback from Parents on Breastfeeding Experiences (During Covid-19)**

UHDB NHS Foundation Trust maternity services acknowledge that dealing with COVID-19 has been a very unsettling and challenging time, especially for pregnant women and new families making a transition to parenthood. Although many changes have been imposed on health services and support teams including restrictions on face to face contacts, we would have hoped that our breastfeeding support should have continued to meet the needs of families in our care.

Both midwives and maternity support workers are trained to be skilled in offering breastfeeding support with standard practice comprising of a breastfeeding assessment and support to recognise if breastfeeding is going well. Community breastfeeding support from maternity services has continued as per pre-covid-19 with face to face support as necessary.

Antenatal information has been provided through Health Zone UK; a free NHS approved app for pregnant women and new parents.

We know that breastfeeding works best when women receive high quality support both in hospital and the community. We also know that clear, consistent information is invaluable in providing the best start possible to families. Therefore, we are saddened to hear that the support for some women who have chosen to breastfeed their babies has not been as readily available or effective as we would have liked.

We would like to thank health watch for exploring families' experiences of breastfeeding and receiving support during the pandemic. Our aim is to use this feedback to ensure that we can learn from these experiences to develop and improve services, moving forward. In order to do this we will:

- Improve the support provided in hospital by completing the mandatory breastfeeding assessment before the mother/baby dyad is discharged from all inpatient services.
- Make sure any parent who requires support with breastfeeding during lockdown know what is available via remote methods such as phone, social media, online video messaging &/or face to face when necessary

### Summary

COVID-19 and lockdown has been a challenging time for breastfeeding families, many women have reported taking a decision to discontinue their chosen method of feeding sooner than anticipated due to a lack of support.

Supporting mothers practically and emotionally through this stressful period with any challenging breastfeeding experiences will likely prevent a premature end to breastfeeding altogether.



## Where to get help and support with Breastfeeding in Derbyshire October 2020

The **national breastfeeding helpline** offers telephone support and information. This includes advice on any issues with feeding, such as: pain, difficulty getting baby to take the breast, or, worries about how much or how often baby is drinking. Tel: 0300 100 0212 from 9:30am to 9:30pm, 7 days per week. Live online support is also available via web chat.

<https://www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk/>

For **breastfeeding support services in Derby City** contact the Infant Feeding Team on 0300 1234586 (option 3): this number currently this takes you to a voicemail, please leave a message (include your baby's name, date of birth and a contact number) and a member of the team will call you back. You can also contact the team via 'ChatHealth' (a secure text messaging service) on 07507 327754. For further details, and for links to useful information, please visit:

<https://www.derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk/services/family-health-derby-city/health-visiting-0-5-years>

For **breastfeeding support services in Derbyshire County** contact our Health Visitors via our single point of access on: 01246 515100, and we will call you back. You can also contact the team for advice via 'ChatHealth' (a secure text messaging service) on 07507 327769.

The **Derbyshire Healthy Family Service** website also has a live chat between 09:30 and 12:00 offering peer support, and has links to lots of useful information. <http://www.derbyshirehealthyfamily.org.uk/>

The **Derbyshire Breastfeeding Network** is continuing to offer support with peer supporter groups, who can answer questions, provide information, and be a safe place to talk.

<http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/derbyshire/>