



Experiences of Breastfeeding Support during COVID-19

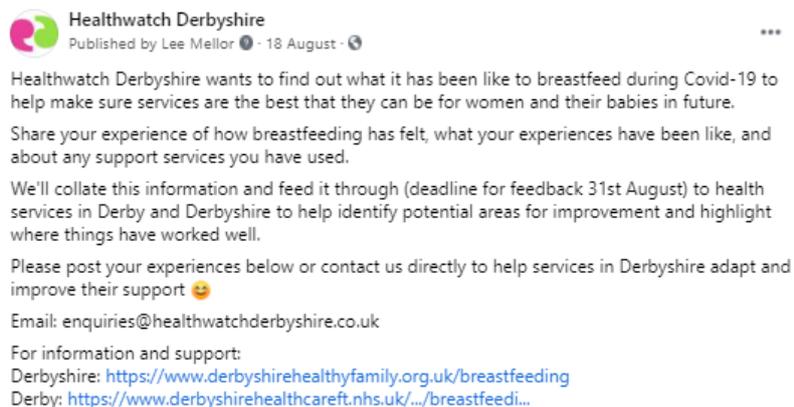
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Background

Healthwatch Derbyshire was approached by the City and County Breastfeeding Strategic group and the Maternity Transformation recovery cell and asked to gather feedback from mums to find out what it's been like to breastfeed during COVID-19.

Method of engagement

Information was collated through comments on direct messages, email and targeted Facebook posts:



Healthwatch Derbyshire
Published by Lee Mellor · 18 August · 🌐

Healthwatch Derbyshire wants to find out what it has been like to breastfeed during Covid-19 to help make sure services are the best that they can be for women and their babies in future.

Share your experience of how breastfeeding has felt, what your experiences have been like, and about any support services you have used.

We'll collate this information and feed it through (deadline for feedback 31st August) to health services in Derby and Derbyshire to help identify potential areas for improvement and highlight where things have worked well.

Please post your experiences below or contact us directly to help services in Derbyshire adapt and improve their support 🙏

Email: enquiries@healthwatchderbyshire.co.uk

For information and support:
Derbyshire: <https://www.derbyshirehealthyfamily.org.uk/breastfeeding>
Derby: <https://www.derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk/.../breastfeedi...>



[Click here for the link to the above post](#)



Healthwatch Derbyshire
Published by Lee Mellor · 28 August · 🌐

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Summary of findings

Feedback collated as part of this campaign has been categorised into five key areas, Support Provided in Hospital, Virtual Support, Community Support, Weighing and Mental Health. Additional feedback has been collated and included on themes such as communication, staff attitude, breastfeeding in public and giving up on breastfeeding.

Feedback obtained has been used to highlight key points in relation to the above category headings. The report has been structured to reflect the journey of Derbyshire County/City mothers who breastfed during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Excerpts from comments included are verbatim as received by people responding to/commenting on the request for feedback from parents on breastfeeding experiences.

Support at Hospital

➤ Support Following Birth

- “... was given very little breastfeeding support at the hospital”
- “First time type 1 diabetic mum 0 support with breastfeeding in hospital”
- “No help given in hospital to get him to latch”
- “Not a positive experience! Got zero help with breastfeeding.”

➤ Signposting

- “I was discharged less than 24 hours following the birth of my daughter with no support or advice and not able to feed her effectively”
- “No help given to BF immediately after birth ... posted to my yoga group in desperation and was finally told about the infant feeding team”
- “Literally self-educated using Google and rang the national breastfeeding helpline.”

➤ Experiences of Tongue-tie

- “... infant feeding specialist who referred me for a tongue tie assessment in Dudley as CRH failed to diagnose”
- “I got told in hospital that my baby had tongue tie then nobody came back to speak to me about it, to say that to a first time mum and not explain it. I didn't have a clue about it or what it meant I had to use Dr google to educate myself”
- “My baby didn't have her tongue-tie revised until we paid privately for it at 12 weeks”
- “My baby had tongue-tie and had to wait 2 months for her to get it sorted.”

Virtual Support

➤ Positives of Virtual Support

- “After a few days of this I decided to reach out for help, and messaged bears Facebook page, someone got back to me within the day and gave me some brilliant advice which helped me a lot. It felt good to know I could message them with any problems/queries I had”.
- “I've called the national breastfeeding helpline. I've attended zoom meetings with Chesterfield and Bolsover support groups. I've also attended zoom groups in Bristol that I found online who offered a free introduction to solids ... the joy of zoom meant I didn't have to be in Bristol to attend their support group”
- “Worth having a look at Breastfeeding Network Derbyshire, who have been running Zoom group sessions online every weekday since the beginning of April - you can choose the group closest to you or join the day that works”
- “There are local groups to you which work under the BfN umbrella - you might also find it helpful to connect with your local branch?”
- “There are a breastfeeding groups also running Zoom meet ups weekly”
- “I also had support from family and friends and knew about my local volunteer group still doing online support.”

➤ **Limitations of Virtual Support**

- “I’ve had to turn to independently ran FB groups for help but that only goes so far as they cannot actually watch how I’m feeding”
- “the only support I could find was virtual ... whilst this was better than nothing having to be available at a set time for a zoom group was difficult with a days old baby and I needed someone to physically be there to see and help move baby into different positions”
- “There was no one available to support within the home and I feel that I would have really benefited from having 1:1 support.”
- “Wasn't at all keen to do zoom calls”
- “I am battling on with combination feeding as breastfeeding support was a phone call which to be honest was pointless as I needed someone to check”
- “The only support I could find was virtual which wasn't helpful given the severity of the situation”

Community Support

➤ **Communication**

- “... referred to get my boys tongue tie snipped at five days and was advised I might have to wait as they didn't know if services were running thankfully I'm in Buxton and knew that the infant feeding service at Stockport was still running. ... snipped at 8days when on day 10 I told the Health visitor she thanked me for this information as she had received a letter from DCHS advising that this service was suspended. They clearly hadn't thought about those treated by hospitals in neighbouring counties. My HV thanked me as she has been telling women incorrectly that this service wasn't available to them”
- “I also found it very disappointed that there was no communication/alternative from HV service regarding the introduction to solids course I was due to attend”
- “I can't imagine what it must be like for new mums or mums who are finding feeding hard to not have support or not realise that there are still volunteers out there helping.”

➤ **Quality of Support**

- “Midwife and health visitor support is just not enough! I've had very little help and it's all been not very helpful. When I've asked for help they have all leaned over for a quick glance and said 'Latch looks fine, just keep going' or 'you won't get the latch any better that' 'not sure what to suggest' ... this is all whilst I'm pleading saying something definitely isn't right as my nipples are cracked and bleeding and it's extremely painful to feed!”
- “Midwives came to visit the day after I came home and were very little help (didn't even offer to check baby's latch when I said my nipples were so sore) midwives visited again on day 5. I was massively engorged, they tried to get baby to latch for 20 minutes whilst she screamed in frustration. Then basically told me my nipples were too flat, she wouldn't latch because I had made her lazy and that I should use my breast pump to express.”

➤ **Encouraged to Bottle Feed**

- “My HV basically told me to put her on formula as she wasn't gaining but I pumped and fed till she was gaining and then went to exclusively breastfeeding”
- “Post-COVID, she noticed that this hands-on support was lacking. She felt that people were actively encouraged to bottle feed as this was an easier option.”

Weighing

➤ **Inability to Accurately Weigh Baby**

- “You obv can't tell how much milk baby is getting compared to formula fed babies- so I have really missed the opportunity for weight sessions (even self-weighting at a central place would be fine) as trying at home just hasn't been accurate”
- “I've been a bit concerned but they wouldn't even come out to weigh her”
- “Not been able to get her weighed so not sure if we were on track or anything”
- “... my current bathroom scales method of weighing my twins really isn't great when they' were premature!”

Mental Health

➤ **Inability to Breastfeed Impacting Mental Health**

- “... I do feel has really negatively impacted my mental health. My baby is 4 weeks old today and I'm still really hurt and upset about how it wouldn't work for us. Had we had more support I feel like things could have been different”
- “I gave birth to my daughter at Royal Derby the day after lockdown (24th March). I was anxious about the level of support I would be able to receive with services being unable to visit homes etc. ... I was finding feeding incredibly hard and painful but didn't feel I could express my worries because of everything going on with Covid. I persevered with breastfeeding and my milk came in on day 6, but by this point, I was feeling low mentally and feeding was taking a toll. ... Since then I have experienced a number of emotions including guilt, envy towards mothers still feeding and upset that I felt I was unable to continue”
- “I didn't even get my 6 week check and have got issues with that too my whole experience has been damaging for my mental health I am so angry about it all to be honest ...”

Positives

➤ **Communication**

- “I knew who to call if needed but I didn't need to”
- “Rang the infant feeding helpline who were great”
- “The health visitor team have also provided some over the phone advice and were really supportive, reassuring and helpful”

➤ **Staff**

- “Midwives were lovely”
- “My HV has been very good but she was in and out in about 20 minutes because they’ve been told not to hang about”
- “Every interaction I have had with health visitors and breastfeeding team I could tell they wanted to help”
- “The health visitor was amazing and tried to help”
- “Derbyshire midwives and health visitors have been amazing with supporting me with breastfeeding my first born”
- “During lockdown I have accessed bf support from HV on the phone. (Joe Glossop was particularly helpful)”

➤ **Having Additional Time**

- “Better being at home than keeping up all other obligations too. It is HARD work being- its been nice to be alone, not stressed to get here and there and school runs, swimming lessons etc. She’s had the best of me. End of a much easier 6mths coming to an end than with the other babies.”

Other

➤ **Feeding in public**

- “I started going to the group to grow my confidence in feeding in public as it’s something I didn’t feel overly comfortable doing. However I had only been to 2 meetings before lockdown started ... I’m still not overly confident in feeding in public but I’m sure the more I do the more I’ll feel comfortable.”
- “Some shops have stopped parents breastfeeding in store to as it means spending longer in the shop.”

➤ **Gave up on Breastfeeding**

- “... was absolutely distraught and gave up breastfeeding on day 6”
- “There was no one available to support within the home and I feel that I would have really benefited from having 1:1 support. By week 4, I decided to transition from breastfeeding to formula for my own mental health and for my daughter”
- “I struggled to be honest and ended up with mastitis because I wasn’t told how to do it properly. I gave up and bottle fed xx”

Reach

People reached: 19,609 (number of Derbyshire/Derby City residents reached - targeted at young mums/those that had would have breast fed during Covid-19)

Engagements: 1306 (number of times post interacted with). **Engagement Rate = 7%**

Thank you

Healthwatch Derbyshire would like to thank all participants who gave their time to talk to us about their experiences of breastfeeding during COVID-19. We also extend our thanks to the Breastfeeding Network Derbyshire who offered virtual breastfeeding support to mums throughout the pandemic.