

Breastfeeding

Key points

In 1998 the rate of full breastfeeding of infants at three months was 51 percent. There has been no significant change in full breastfeeding rates between 1994 and 1998.

Māori infants (39 percent) were less likely to be fully breastfed compared with Pacific (44 percent) and European and Other infants (55 percent).

A project to develop clear and consistent definitions for breastfeeding was completed in February 1999. These definitions are used to monitor breastfeeding targets.

Full or partial breastfeeding at six months of age was 60 percent in 1998. As with the breastfeeding rate at three months, there has been little change in the rate of full or partial breastfeeding at six months since 1990.

Targets

To increase full breastfeeding at three months to 70 percent by 1997, and to 75 percent by 2000.

To increase breastfeeding (full or partial) at six months to 70 percent by 1997, and to 75 percent by 2000.

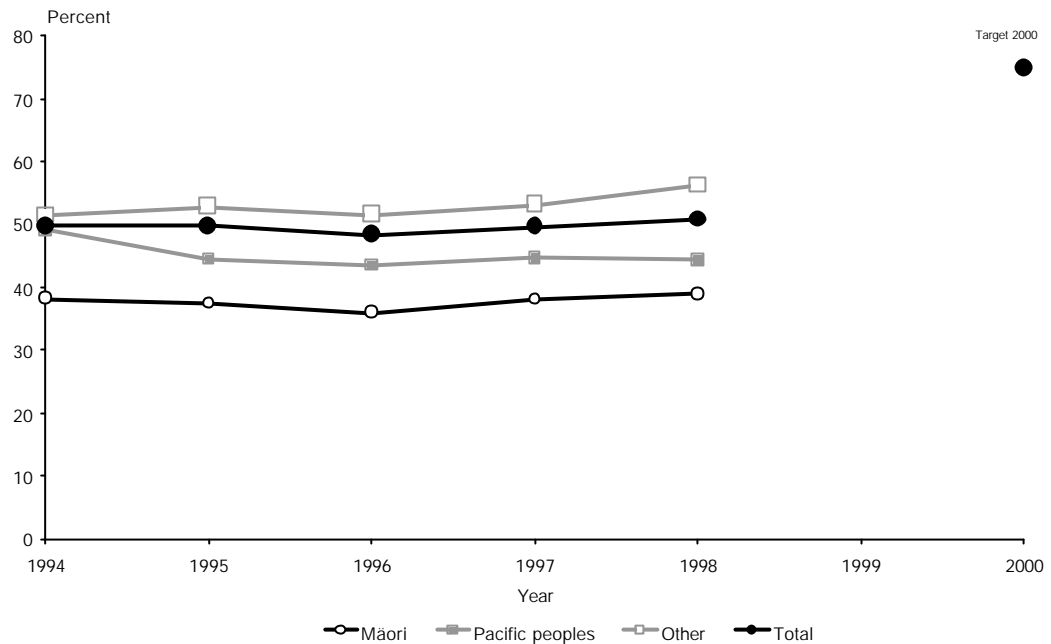
Progress towards the targets

Full breastfeeding at three months

The full breastfeeding rate at three months of age was about 51 percent in 1998. Figure 1 illustrates that there has been little change in the prevalence since 1994. Māori infants were less likely to be fully breastfed compared to infants of other ethnic background. In 1998 39 percent of Māori infants were fully breastfed at the age of three months compared to 44 percent of Pacific and 55 percent of European and Other infants.

Because unrepresentative baseline data were used to set the targets for full breastfeeding of infants at three months for 1997 and 2000, these targets were unrealistic (Ministry of Health 1998). Hence, the current rate of full breastfeeding of infants at three months is not evaluated against these target levels. It will require approximately a 21 percent annual increase in the percentage of fully or partially breastfed infants at three months of age to achieve the target which is unlikely to be met by 2000.

Figure 1: Percentage of babies being fully breastfed at three months, by ethnicity, 1994–98



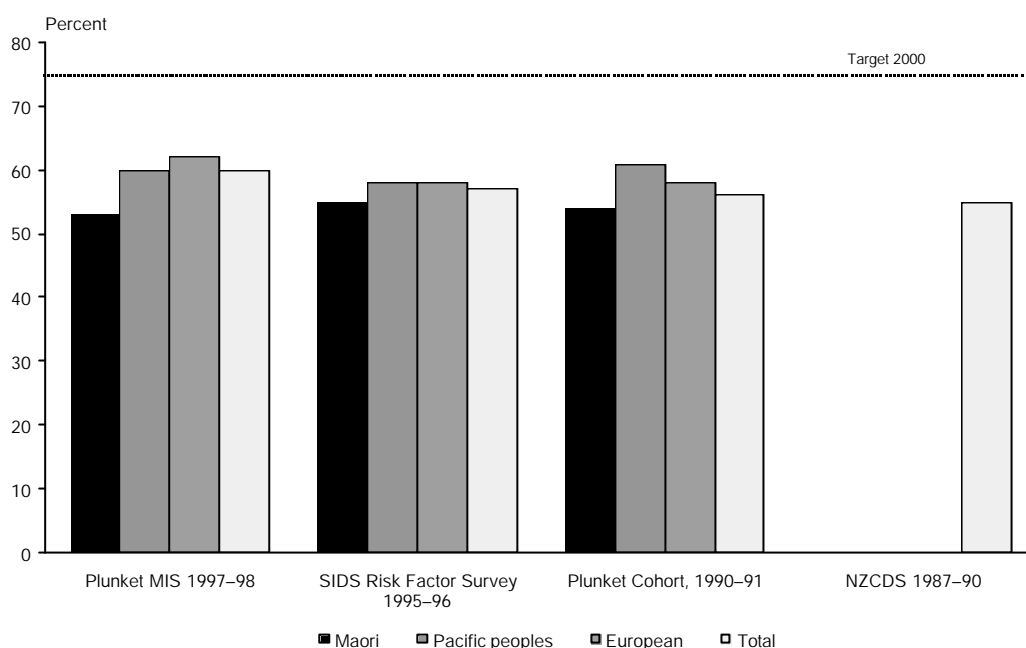
Source: Plunket Management Information System 1994–98

Full or partial breastfeeding at six months

Full or partial breastfeeding at six months of age is 60 percent according to the Plunket MIS data for 1998. Māori infants (53 percent) were less likely than Pacific (60 percent) and European and Other (62 percent) infants to be breastfed at six months (Figure 2).

As for the rate of breastfeeding at the age of three months, there has been little change in the prevalence of full or partial breastfeeding at the age of six months since 1990. Unlike the targets of full breastfeeding at three months, the target of 75 percent infants being breastfed either fully or partially at the age of six months appears to be realistic (Ministry of Health 1998). It will require an additional 12 percent annual increase in the proportion of full or partially breastfed infants at six months of age to achieve the 2000 target. As no progress towards the target has been made, it is highly unlikely that target will be met.

Figure 2: Percentage of babies being fully or partially breastfed at six months, by ethnicity and sources of data



Sources: New Zealand Cot Death Study 1987-90; Plunket National Child Health Study 1990-91; SIDS Risk Factor Survey 1995-96; Plunket Management System 1997-98

Data for 1997-98 are from the Plunket MIS (Royal New Zealand Plunket Society 1999). These data will give a slightly higher prevalence of breastfeeding as they are for the 4-6 months age band, and will therefore need to be interpreted cautiously.

Indicators

- ?? The proportion of infants being fully breastfed at three months.
- ?? The proportion of infants being fully or partially breastfed at six months.

Full breastfeeding is defined as 'the infant has taken breast milk only, no other liquids or solids except a minimal amount of water or prescribed medicines, in the past 48 hours' (Coubrough 1999). Partial breastfeeding is defined as 'the infant has taken some breast milk and some infant formula or other solid food in the past 48 hours' (Coubrough 1999).

Data sources

Data from the Plunket Management Information System (MIS) have been used in recent years to monitor the breastfeeding targets at three months of age. The following sources of data have also been used to monitor the breastfeeding targets at six months:

- ?? 1987-90 New Zealand Cot Death Survey
- ?? Plunket National Child Health Study (1990-91)
- ?? SIDS Risk Factor Survey (1996).

References

- Coubrough L. 1999. *Breastfeeding Definitions for Monitoring the National Health Outcome Targets in New Zealand*. A final report prepared for the Ministry of Health. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
- Ministry of Health. 1998. *Progress on Health Outcome Targets: Te Haere Whakamua ki ngā Whāinga Hua mö te Hauora. The state of the public health in New Zealand 1998*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
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