Importance of Breastfeeding
Breastfeeding Promotion Committee Report to the California Department of
Health Services Primary Care and Family Health

Human milk is uniquely suited for human infants.
- Human milk is easy to digest and contains all the nutrients that babies need in the early months of life.
- Breast milk contains factors that help infants grow and mature.
- Factors in breast milk protect infants from a wide variety of illnesses.
- Breast milk contains antibodies specific to illnesses encountered by each mother and baby.
- Fatty acids, unique to human milk, may play a role in infant brain and visual development.
- In several large studies, children who have been breastfed had a small advantage over those who have been artificially fed when given a variety of cognitive and neurological tests, including measures of IQ.

Breastfeeding saves lives.
- Lack of breastfeeding is a risk factor for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Human milk may protect premature infants from life-threatening gastrointestinal disease.

Breastfeeding infants are healthier.
- Infants who are exclusively breastfed for at least 4 months are half as likely as artificially (milk or mild substitute other than mother’s milk) fed infants to have ear infections in the first year of life.
- Breastfeeding reduces the incidence and lessens the severity of bacterial infections such as meningitis, lower respiratory infections, and bacteremia in infants.
- Breastfeeding is protective against infant botulism.
- Evidence suggests that exclusive breastfeeding for at least two months protects susceptible children from Type 1 insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM).
- Breastfeeding may reduce the risk for subsequent inflammatory bowel disease and childhood lymphoma.
- Breastfed infants are less likely to have diarrhea.
- Women who were breastfed as a child are less likely to develop multiple sclerosis.

Breastfeeding helps mothers recover from childbirth.
- Breastfeeding helps the uterus shrink to its pre-pregnancy state and reduces blood lost after delivery.
- Mothers who breastfeed for at least 3 months may lose more weight than bottle-feeding mothers.
- Breastfeeding mothers usually resume their menstrual cycles 20 to 30 weeks later than bottle-feeding moms.

Breastfeeding keeps women healthy throughout their lives.
- Breastfeeding can be an important factor in child spacing among women who do not use contraceptives.
- Breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast and ovarian cancer.
- Breastfeeding may reduce the risk of osteoporosis.
- During lactation, total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and triglyceride levels decline while the beneficial HDL cholesterol level remains high.

Breastfeeding is economical.
- The cost of artificial milk has increase 150 percent since the 1980’s.
- If no California infants were breastfed, the cost of artificial baby milk would exceed $400 million per year.
- Breastfeeding reduces health care costs.

Breastfeeding is environmentally sound.
- Unlike artificial baby milk, breastfeeding requires no fossil fuels for its manufacture or preparation.
- Breastfeeding reduces pollutants created as by-products during the manufacture of plastics and artificial baby milk.
- Breastfeeding reduces the burden on our landfills.