

Study: Associations between breastfeeding and select health outcomes for off-reserve First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children in Canada

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Monday, March 20, 2017

Past research has shown that breastfeeding is related to positive health outcomes among infants and children, but less is known about the possible benefits of breastfeeding among specific groups of Aboriginal children.

Today, a new study fills this gap by examining the relationship between breastfeeding and the prevalence of asthma/chronic bronchitis and chronic ear infections among First Nations children living off reserve, Métis children and Inuit children.

The study, based on data from the Aboriginal Children's Survey, finds that First Nations children living off reserve and who were breast-fed had a lower prevalence of asthma/chronic bronchitis and chronic ear infections.

This result held true even after controlling for other clinical, demographic and other factors that might have an impact on health outcomes. Nevertheless, the results should not be interpreted as causal relationships.

In the case of Métis or Inuit children, however, there was no significant relationship between breastfeeding and the prevalence of asthma/chronic bronchitis or chronic ear infections.

Note to readers

The Aboriginal Children's Survey (ACS) is a post-censal survey that was conducted once by Statistics Canada, in 2006. The target population was all children in Canada under the age of 6 (as of October 31, 2006) with First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuit identity or ancestry. Children living in institutions and children living on reserve in the provinces were excluded.

The sample included more than 12,000 children aged 1 to 5, but a small number of children were 6 years of age by the time of the survey. Children with Aboriginal identity were selected, and only children with single responses for First Nations, Métis or Inuit categories were considered in this study. The sample was also restricted to children whose birth mother responded to the survey. Birth mothers were selected as respondents not only for consistency with previous research, but also because they are the most likely to have the best knowledge and recall of the child's health and feeding history. Comparisons with other surveys that also collect breastfeeding information for the general population (such as the Canadian Community Health Survey) are not possible given differences in survey methodology.

This paper examines the association between breastfeeding and health outcomes such as asthma/chronic bronchitis and chronic ear infections, based on logistic regression analyses. Breastfeeding was examined in two ways: the first compared children who were breastfed to those who were bottle-fed, and the second focused on the duration of breastfeeding.

Not all factors that may be related to health outcomes examined in the study—such as cultural variables or specific predisposing health conditions—could be accounted for in the models. The ACS is also a cross-sectional survey. Therefore, the results shown are associations between variables, and should not be interpreted as cause and effect relationships.



Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5108](#).

The article "[Association between breastfeeding and select chronic conditions among off-reserve First Nations, Métis and Inuit children in Canada](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca).

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