

2.23 Breastfeeding practices

The breastfeeding status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander infants, breastfeeding duration, breastfeeding and other sources of food and reasons why mothers stopped breastfeeding

Data sources

Data for this indicator come from the 2004–05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS).

The 2004–05 NATSIHS collected information from 10,439 Indigenous Australians of all ages. This sample was considerably larger than the supplementary Indigenous samples in the 1995 and 2001 National Health Surveys. The survey was conducted in remote and non-remote areas of Australia and collected a range of information from Indigenous Australians about health-related issues including health-related actions, health risk factors, health status, socioeconomic circumstances and women's health. It is planned to repeat the NATSIHS at six-yearly intervals, with the next NATSIHS to be conducted in 2010–11. Selected non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the 2004–05 National Health Survey (NHS).

Definitions of breastfeeding terms

Breastfeeding. The child receives some breastmilk but can also receive any food or liquid including non-human milk.

Breastfeeding duration. The total length of time an infant received any breastmilk at all from initiation through until weaning is complete.

Ever breastfed. An infant has been put to the breast, even if only once, and/or an infant has received expressed breastmilk but has never been put to the breast.

Exclusively breastfed. An infant has received only breastmilk from his/her mother or a wet nurse or expressed breastmilk and no other liquids or solids with the exception of drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicines.

Predominantly breastfed. An infant's predominant source of nourishment has been breastmilk but the infant has also received water and water-based drinks (sweetened and flavoured water, teas, infusions, etc.); fruit juice; oral rehydration solution (ORS); drops and syrup forms of vitamins, minerals and medicines; and/or ritual foods (in limited quantities). All other food-based fluids are excluded, in particular non-human milk.

Fully breastfed. An infant is fully breastfed if he/she receives breastmilk as the main source of nourishment. This includes infants who are either (a) exclusively breastfed or (b) predominantly breastfed – that is, infants with no other liquids or solids (except vitamins, mineral supplements, or medicines) or infants who receive breast milk and water, water-based drinks, fruit juice, oral rehydration solution, but do not receive breast milk substitutes or solids. The fully breastfed rate is the combined rate of exclusively breastfed and predominantly breastfed (Webb et al. 2001).

Data analyses

Breastfeeding status

- In 2004–05, approximately 79% of Indigenous infants aged 0–3 years had ever been breastfed compared to 88% of non-Indigenous infants.
- Approximately 13% of Indigenous infants aged 0–3 years were currently being breastfed compared to 16% of non-Indigenous infants of the same age.
- A similar proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous infants aged 0–3 years had been breastfed for 12 months or more (13% and 14% respectively).
- The maximum duration of breastfeeding among fully breastfed children was 130 weeks for Indigenous children compared to 156 weeks for non-Indigenous children.

Breastfeeding status by state/territory

- In Queensland a significantly lower proportion of Indigenous infants aged 0–3 years had ever been breastfed (79%) compared to non-Indigenous infants (89%) (Table 2.23.1; Figure 2.23.1).

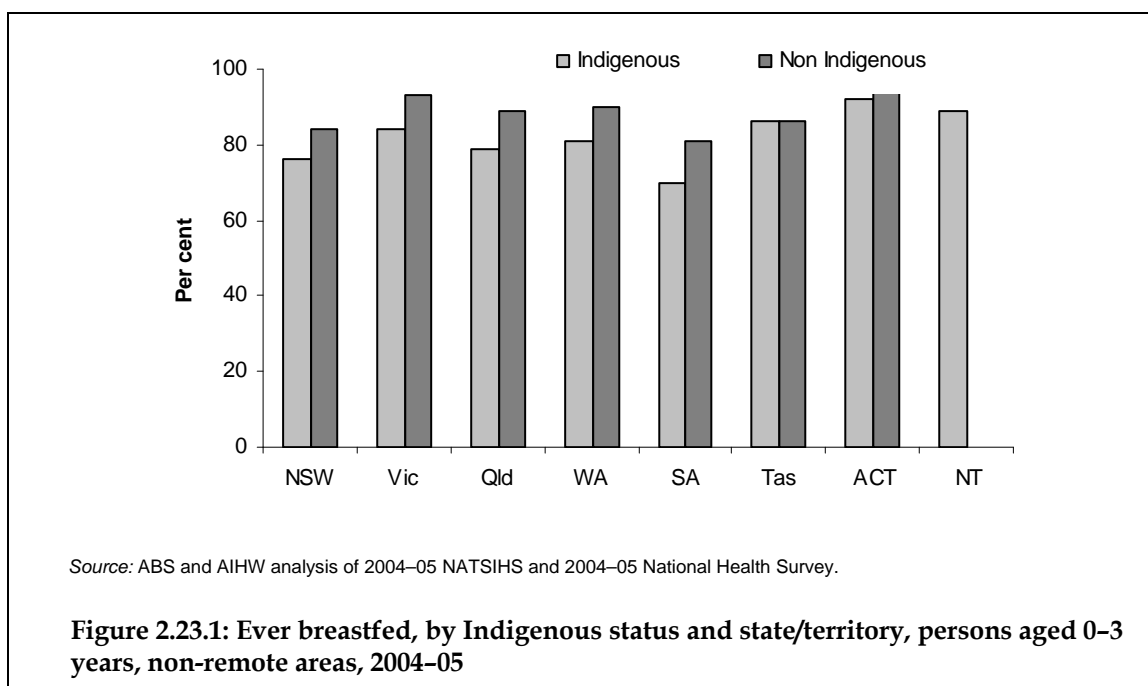
Table 2.23.1: Breastfeeding status, by state/territory and Indigenous status, persons aged 0–3 years in non-remote areas, 2004–05

Breastfeeding measure	NSW		Vic		Qld		WA		SA		Tas.		ACT		NT		Australia	
	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig. ^(a)	Indig.	Non-Indig.
	Proportion (%)																	
Child has been breastfed																		
0 to less than 6 months	35	33	43	39	31	39	22	34	27	33	51	35	41	29	32	n.p.	33	36
For 6 months to 12 months	21	25	22 ^(g)	25	19 ^(f)	20	14 ^(f)	16	16 ^(g)	19	15 ^(f)	18	16 ^(f)	24	15 ^(f)	n.p.	19	22
12 months or more ^(b)	11	13	10 ^(g)	14	18 ^(f)	13	15 ^(f)	16	10 ^(g)	17	9 ^(g)	15	17 ^(f)	23 ^(f)	13 ^(f)	n.p.	13	14
Currently breastfeeding	8 ^(f)	13	9 ^(f)	15	12 ^(f)	17	30 ^(f)	24	18 ^(f)	13	11 ^(g)	17	17 ^(f)	21 ^(f)	29 ^(f)	n.p.	13	16
<i>Ever breastfed</i>	76	84	84	93	79*	89*	81	90	70	81	86	86	92	96	89	n.p.	79*	88*
Never breastfed	24	16	15 ^{*(f)}	7*	20	10	19 ^(f)	10 ^(f)	30 ^(f)	19	14 ^(f)	14 ^(f)	5 ^(g)	4 ^(f)	11 ^(f)	n.p.	21*	12*
Total ^(c)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	n.p.	100	100
Total Persons	13,418	310,805	2,373	240,930	10,325	182,712	3,552	85,191	2,019	69,745	1,762	22,526	433	16,702	1,082	4,402	34,964	933,013
	Weeks																	
Maximum duration of breastfeeding among fully breastfed children (weeks) ^(d)	78 ^(e)	104 ^(e)	56 ^(e)	104 ^(e)	117 ^(e)	87 ^(e)	83 ^(e)	109 ^(e)	52 ^(e)	104 ^(e)	65 ^(e)	84 ^(e)	78 ^(e)	70 ^(e)	78 ^(e)	n.p.	130	156
Minimum duration of breastfeeding among fully breastfed children (weeks) ^(d)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n.p.	1	1

* Represents results with statistically significant differences in the Indigenous/non-Indigenous comparisons.

- (a) Non-Indigenous results are not provided as the non-Indigenous sample for this area was insufficient for purposes of estimation for these characteristics.
- (b) Includes length of time child has been breastfed not known.
- (c) Includes breastfeeding status not known.
- (d) Excludes children currently breastfed and children who had been fully breastfed for less than 1 week.
- (e) Indicates that the maximum length of time breastfed in weeks is greater than this value, but for confidentiality reasons the maximum length of time cannot be released.
- (f) Estimates having a relative standard error of 25% to 50% should be used with caution.
- (g) Estimates having a relative standard error greater than 50% are considered too unreliable.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.



Breastfeeding status by remoteness

- In 2004–05, approximately 20% of Indigenous children aged 0–3 years were currently being breastfed, 60% had previously been breastfed but not currently, and 19% had never been breastfed (Table 2.23.2).
- Breastfeeding status varied by remoteness, with a higher proportion of Indigenous children in remote areas currently being breastfed than Indigenous children in non-remote areas (Figure 2.23.2). Approximately 42% of Indigenous children aged 0–3 years in remote areas were currently being breastfed, 43% had previously been breastfed and 14% had never been breastfed. This compared to 13%, 65% and 21% of Indigenous infants in non-remote areas respectively.
- At ages 0–6 months, 6–12 months and 1–3 years, a higher proportion of Indigenous infants in remote areas were breastfeeding their children than in non-remote areas.

Table 2.23.2: Breastfeeding status, by remoteness and length at which child breastfed, Indigenous persons aged 0–3 years, 2004–05

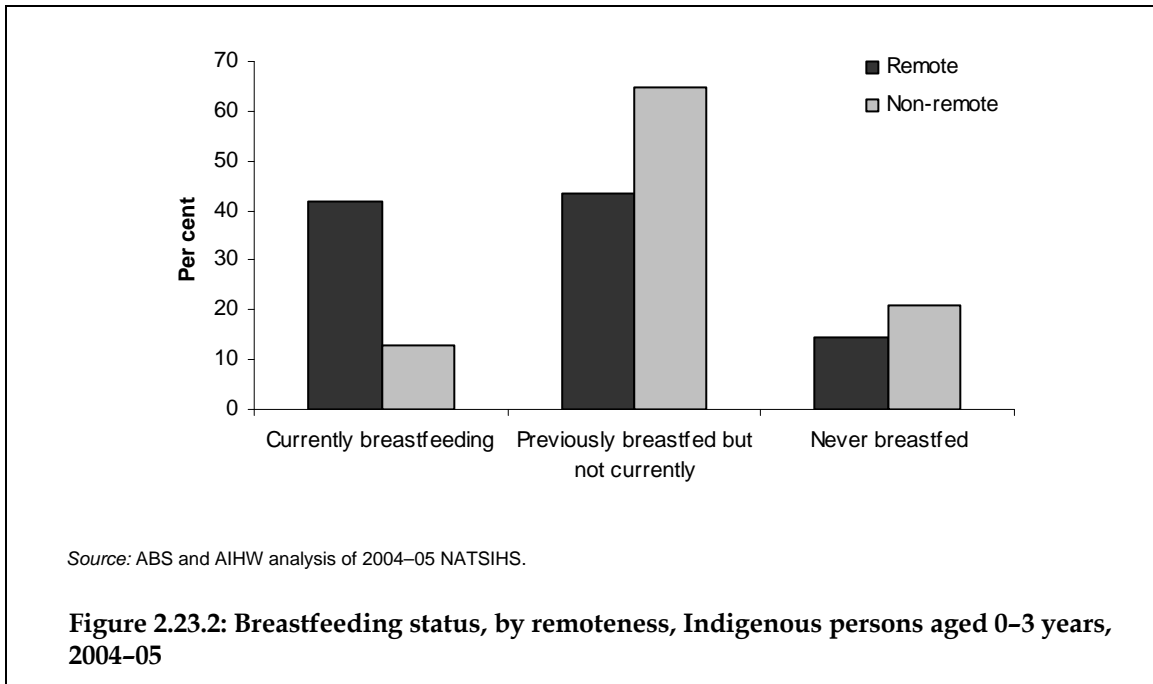
Breastfeeding status	Less than 6 months			6 months to <12 months			12 months—3 years			Total aged 0–3 years		
	Remote	Non-remote	Total	Remote	Non-remote	Total	Remote	Non-remote	Total	Remote	Non-remote	Total
	(per cent)											
Currently breastfeeding	85.4	55.6	61.2	82.2	31.1 ^(a)	46.5	30.4	4.0	10.7	42.0	13.0	20.3
Previously breastfed but not currently	6.6 ^(b)	30.8 ^(a)	26.2 ^(a)	9.0 ^(a)	56.5	42.17	53.2	72.2	67.4	43.4	64.6	60.0
Never breastfed	8.0 ^(b)	13.6 ^(a)	12.6 ^(a)	8.9 ^(a)	12.4 ^(a)	11.3 ^(a)	15.9	23.3	21.5	14.3	21.0	19.3
Total^(c)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total persons	964	4,160	5,124	1,585	3,662	5,247	9,165	27,142	36,307	11,713	34,964	46,677

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use

(c) Includes previously breastfed but current status not known, not stated and not known if breastfed.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS.



Breastfeeding status when first taken home from hospital

- In 2004-05, approximately 96% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 0-3 years in non-remote areas were breastfed when they were first taken home from hospital (Table 2.23.3).
- The proportion of Indigenous infants aged 0-3 years who were breastfed when they were first taken home from hospital ranged from 89% in the Australian Capital Territory to 98% in the Northern Territory.

Table 2.23.3: Breastfeeding status when first taken home from hospital, by state/territory, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 0–3 years who were breastfed, non-remote areas, 2004–05

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
	(per cent)								
Breastfed when first taken home	97	96	95	96	92	95	89	98	96
Not breastfed when first taken home	2 ^(b)	4 ^(b)	—	3 ^(b)	2 ^(b)	4 ^(b)	11 ^(b)	—	2 ^(a)
No hospital	—	—	—	1 ^(b)	—	— ^(b)	—	2 ^(b)	— ^(b)
Total ever breastfed	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total number ever breastfed	10,186	1,983	8,014	2,871	1,449	1,507	396	962	27,369

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS.

Additional information

Breastfeeding and other sources of food

- In 2004–05, approximately 45% of Indigenous infants aged less than 6 months in non-remote areas were fully breastfed in the 24 hours prior to survey. Approximately 31% were breastfed exclusively, 8% received solid or semi-solid food and 13% received breastmilk substitutes in the 24 hours prior to survey (Table 2.23.4).

Table 2.23.4: Breastfeeding and other sources of food in last 24 hours, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged up to 6 months currently breastfed in non-remote areas, 2004–05

Breastfeeding and other sources of food in previous 24 hours	Number	Proportion (%)
Breastfed exclusively ^(a)	1,277	31
Solid or semi-solid food	325	8 ^(b)
Breastmilk replacement ^(c)	526	13 ^(b)
Fully breastfed ^(d)	1,867	45

- (a) An infant has received only breastmilk from his/her mother or a wet nurse or expressed breastmilk and no other liquids or solids with the exception of drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicines.
- (b) Estimates having a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% should be used with caution.
- (c) Breastmilk replacements includes infants fed infant formula and/or tinned, powdered or fresh milk.
- (d) Fully breastfed is comprised of those infants who receive breastmilk as the main source of food and are either breastfed exclusively or breastfed predominantly. Infants breastfed predominantly are those who received breastmilk and water, water-based drinks, fruit juice and oral rehydration solution, but do not receive breastmilk substitutes or solids.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.

Age at which first given solid food

- Indigenous infants aged 0–3 months were almost twice as likely to be given solid food as non-Indigenous infants (18% compared to 10%) (Table 2.23.5).
- Indigenous infants aged 3–6 months and 6–9 months were less likely to be given solid food than non-Indigenous infants of the same age.

Table 2.23.5: Age at which first given solid food regularly, by Indigenous status, persons aged 0–3 years in non-remote areas, 2004–05

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Ratio
	%	%	
1–3 months	18	10	1.8*
3–6 months	34	40	0.9*
6–9months	28	34	0.8*
9+months	8	6	1.3
Sub total given solid food ^(a)	91	90	1.0
solid food not given regularly	8	10	0.8
Total^(b)	100	100	..
Total persons	34,964	933,013	..

* Represents results with statistically significant differences in the Indigenous/non-Indigenous comparisons.

(a) Includes not known age first given solid food.

(b) Includes not known whether given solid food.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS and 2004–05 National Health Survey.

Reasons why stopped breastfeeding

- In 2004–05, the main reason why mothers of Indigenous infants aged 0–3 years in non-remote areas stopped breastfeeding was that they were no longer producing any or adequate milk (32%). Approximately 21% of Indigenous infants were no longer breastfed because mothers felt it was time to stop and for 6%, the mother was pregnant again (Table 2.23.6) Approximately 16% of Indigenous infants were no longer breastfed due to 'other problems with breastfeeding' (for example, cracked nipples).

Table 2.23.6: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons aged 0–3 years, by main reason stopped breastfeeding, non-remote areas, 2004–05

Main reason stopped breastfeeding	Proportion (%)
Not producing any/adequate milk	32
Felt it was time to stop	21
Pregnant	6 ^(a)
Teething	5 ^(a)
Resumed work	4 ^(a)
Child bored	1 ^(b)
Other problems with breastfeeding (e.g. cracked nipples)	16
Not stated	2 ^(b)
Total breastfed^(c)	100
Total persons	22,941

(a) Estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

(b) Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

(c) Total comprises all persons who are not currently breastfed.

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2004–05 NATSIHS.

Data quality issues

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)

The NATSIHS uses the standard Indigenous status question. The NATSIHS sample was specifically designed to select a representative sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and thus overcomes the problems inherent in most national surveys with small and unrepresentative Indigenous samples. As with other surveys, the NATSIHS is subject to sampling and non-sampling errors. Calculations of standard errors and significance testing help to identify the accuracy of the estimates and differences.

Information recorded in this survey is essentially 'as reported' by respondents. The ABS makes every effort to collect accurate information from respondents, particularly through careful questionnaire design, pre-testing of questionnaires, use of trained interviewers and assistance from Indigenous facilitators. Nevertheless, some responses may be affected by imperfect recall or individual interpretation of survey questions (ABS 2004).

Non-Indigenous comparisons are available through the General Social Survey. Time series comparisons are available through the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

In remote communities there were some modifications to the NATSIHS content in order to address language and cultural appropriateness in traditional communities, as well as to assist respondents in understanding the concepts. Some questions were excluded and some reworded. Also, paper forms were used in communities in remote areas and computer-assisted interview (CAI) instruments were used in non-remote areas. The CAI process included built in edit checks and sequencing.

Further information on NATSIHS data quality issues can be found in the national publication (ABS 2006a).

Breastfeeding data

The following points should be considered when interpreting data on breastfeeding from the NATSIHS:

- *The sample size of respondents less than 6 months of age will affect the reliability of estimates.*
- *Information is 'as reported' by respondents. No analysis has been undertaken regarding the accuracy of these reported data and whether the accuracy of recall declines as the child gets older.*
- *In addition, the accuracy of the data may be reduced in cases where an adult other than the child's mother responded for the child; this occurred for around 27% of children aged 0–3 years (21% non-remote, 33% remote).*
- *Issues relating to the benefits of breastfeeding have been widely promoted in the community and some respondents may have tended to report recommended practices rather than actual practices (ABS 2006b).*
- *In addition, respondents may not have interpreted the concept 'regularly' in relation to the solids question, where they did not seek clarification from the interviewer. It should also be kept in mind that the inclusion of both children who are still breastfeeding at the time of the survey with those who have ceased may produce estimates that are lower than expected.*

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2006a. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004–05. ABS cat. no. 4715.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2006b. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004–05: user's guide. ABS cat. no. 4715.0.55.004. Canberra: ABS.

Webb K, Marks G, Lund-Adams M, Rutishauser IHE, Abraham B 2001. Towards a national system for monitoring breastfeeding in Australia. Canberra: Australian Food and Nutrition Monitoring Unit.