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When it comes to the health of your baby, the breast is best

STANTON~ For the very best start in life, exclusive breastfeeding is the healthiest, not to mention the most inexpensive, option. Packed with nutrients and antibodies to protect against illness, breast milk is nature's perfect food.

New mothers are highly encouraged to breastfeed exclusively (no other foods or drinks) until six months of age and continue breastfeeding when other foods begin after six months of age. Breastfeeding after six months gives babies powerful protection from bacteria and viruses, adequate nutrition, feelings of comfort and security, and a way to reconnect with the mother when she must go back to work.

Studies show that babies gain many benefits from breastfeeding. Those benefits include:

- Protection from bacterial and viral infections.
- Decreased chance of developing obesity.
- Fewer episodes of diarrhea during infancy, decreased incidence of childhood leukemia, and fewer cases of sudden infant death syndrome.
- Reduction in ear infections by up to 50 percent and serious lower respiratory track infections by 72 percent.
- Lower risk of developing asthma.
- Reduced risk for developing lymphoma and leukemia.
- Reduced risk for developing Type I and Type II Diabetes.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that women who do not breastfeed have an increased risk of developing Type II Diabetes, Ovarian Cancer and Breast Cancer.

"Breastfeeding makes such a significant contribution to the health, development and emotional well-being of children," said Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) "One simply can't ignore the fact that when it comes to feeding newborns the *breast is best*."

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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