

AMH Women's Health and Childbirth Center "Baby Friendly"

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Hospital is First in St. Louis Area to Achieve International Designation

ALTON - The Women's Health and Childbirth Center at Alton Memorial Hospital is excited to announce that it is officially "Baby Friendly," making AMH the first hospital in the St. Louis area to achieve that designation.

Baby-Friendly USA assessors were at AMH earlier this summer to ensure that the practices supporting the tenets of Baby Friendly are in place, and confirmation was received in early August. Currently, there are only 11 hospitals in Illinois that have been able to meet the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative criteria – and none closer than Springfield.

Baby-Friendly USA is the U.S. authority for the implementation of BFHI, a global program sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The initiative encourages and recognizes hospitals and birthing centers that offer an optimal level of care for breastfeeding mothers and their babies. Based on the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*, this prestigious international award recognizes birth facilities that offer breastfeeding mothers the information, confidence, and skills needed to successfully initiate and continue breastfeeding their babies.

"We are very excited about the Baby Friendly designation," said Lori Fassler, nurse clinician at the AMH Women's Health and Childbirth Center. "This is important because it means that not only do we think we promote best infant feeding and bonding practices as outlined by Baby Friendly USA, but a group of independent reviewers has observed our practices and has verified that we meet those stringent standards.

"The report mentioned how very organized our staff is, and also how the families were well informed and enthusiastic in sharing their experiences."

Since 2012, the AMH Women's Health and Childbirth Center has been on a four-phase journey towards Baby Friendly designation.

"An incredible amount of practice change, shift in culture, and extensive amount of staff and physician training in breastfeeding, formula feeding and birth practices were necessary to get to this milestone," said Jessica Mossman, manager of the Women's Health and Childbirth Center. "All of that practice change and education has helped to ensure that mothers have access to staff members knowledgeable in all aspects of infant feeding and bonding."

The focus is on more than breastfeeding, though. These steps also include measures that enhance mother/baby bonding, support mothers in the safe preparation of infant formula when necessary, and protect mothers against inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes.

“Our goal is to make sure that the staff and physicians are doing everything possible to help mothers and babies have the best start,” said Fassler. “Important to BFHI is that all mothers experience hospital practices that allow for mom and baby to stay together, increase the likelihood that mothers who choose to breastfeed are able to meet their goals, and ensure that mothers who choose to formula feed know how best to safely prepare and feed their babies. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding for at least one year, and the World Health Organization endorses two or more years of breastfeeding for optimum health.

“However, in the instance where a mother cannot or chooses not to breastfeed, the Women’s Health and Childbirth Center at AMH continues to provide formula for use during the hospital stay. Our staff was already excellent at supporting mothers with their needs, but the practice changes that we’ve put in place to work towards Baby Friendly designation have made us even better.”

