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News Release

*For Immediate Release*

### **Local physicians, lactation experts dispute recent study's message**

A recently-published study in the journal *Pediatrics* made headlines when it suggested that giving a "small amount" of formula to newborn babies may actually help mothers keep breastfeeding longer over time. The study also caught the attention of local physicians and lactation experts who are members of the Greater Ozarks Regional Breastfeeding Coalition, and who felt it may send a confusing message to new moms.

The research looked at a relatively small number of newborn babies who had lost an arbitrary percentage of birth weight. Some of their mothers were encouraged to exclusively breastfeed, while the rest were given lactation help in the form of small amounts of formula to supplement breastfeeding – about one-third of an ounce. The study found that more of the mothers who used the supplemental formula breastfed longer and more exclusively than those in the group who did not.

"The headlines were misleading to imply that mothers should add formula to help with breastfeeding," says Dr. Tamara Fusco, pediatrician and lactation consultant with Mercy Springfield. "There is a much broader body of research that shows that formula supplementation has a very negative impact on successful and sustained breastfeeding which then impacts child and maternal health."

With properly managed breastfeeding, most babies do very well without any additional formula. If a mother is unable to provide expressed colostrum (a type of high-protein milk produced in late pregnancy), and if donor milk is unavailable, a baby may need to have a very small and physiologically appropriate amount of formula – preferably fed by cup or spoon.

"Introduction of any formula changes the intestinal colonization which may affect the health and well-being of the infant for the remainder of his life," said Dr. Ann Hilmo, neonatologist with Cox Health. Introducing too much formula – or in fact, any whatsoever – to a baby's diet when breastfeeding is possible may have negative consequences in the long term, local experts say. The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that exclusive breastfeeding lowers the risks of many diseases such as ear infections, gastroenteritis, necrotizing enterocolitis, diabetes mellitus, and even some leukemias.

Furthermore, since both CoxHealth and Mercy in Springfield have priority access to donor milk from the Heart of America Mothers Milk Bank, babies needing supplementation can receive donor human milk, thanks to the newly opened Greater Ozarks Regional Mothers Milk Bank in Springfield. This depot is the first major project of the Greater Ozarks Regional Breastfeeding Coalition. More information about the depot can be found at <http://health.springfieldmo.gov/milkdepot>.

"We began this Coalition to provide more support for breastfeeding in our area and to help deliver a more consistent message to local breastfeeding moms," said Dr. Chan Reyes, family physician with Jordan Valley Community Health Center.

"We know that keeping mom and baby together, giving skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding often are the keys to successful breastfeeding," says Cheryl Blevins, RN, public health nurse with the health department and current Coalition chair. "With Cox and Mercy now both providing room-in care and having access to donor milk, the need for formula during that crucial initial period after birth should be greatly reduced for newborns in the Ozarks."

To reach any of the experts listed in this release about this study and breastfeeding in general, reporters are asked to contact media relations staff at their respective institutions:

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