



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 11, 2013

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## **National survey finds moms face many physical and emotional challenges after birth; many have concerns about injury from medical errors while in the hospital for birth**

### **One-half of working moms say employment impacted baby feeding decisions**

(New York) Women giving birth in U.S. hospitals reported experiencing a wide range of physical and emotional conditions as new-onset problems in the first two months after birth. These included pain and infection, urinary and bowel problems, concern with weight control, lack of sexual desire, feelings of stress and depression, and sleep loss and exhaustion. Six or more months after birth, at least one woman in five experienced persisting backache, sleep loss, stress, physical exhaustion, and lack of sexual desire. Sixteen percent of women who had had a cesarean reported pain and 5% infection at the incision site that continued for six or more months. One in six mothers met criteria for depression, but fewer than half with the problem sought help for it.

The new survey polled 1072 women in-depth about their postpartum experiences and their views of many aspects of maternity care. Despite nationally recognized concerns about the quality of maternity care, including overuse of many interventions, the mothers agreed that recommendations of maternity care providers reliably reflect current evidence about what works best (82%, versus 10% disagree), that getting more rather than fewer tests and treatments is generally better quality care (62% versus 22%), and that more effective tests and treatments generally cost more than those that don't work as well (52% versus 27%).

Forty-three percent of mothers said they were "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about serious medical mistakes or injury occurring in the hospital during or immediately after birth. These opinions varied by race/ethnicity groupings, with black (non-Hispanic) and Hispanic mothers generally expressing more concern than white (non-Hispanic) mothers.

A number of survey findings relate to recent national discussions of breastfeeding and support for breastfeeding under the Affordable Care Act:

- 49% of moms said their plans for employment had impacted their decisions about how to feed their babies, with many describing reduced breastfeeding.
- 61% of working moms said their employers offered reasonable breaks to express breast milk.
- 50% of working moms reported that a private space other than a bathroom was available at work for pumping.

"Less than half of mothers who began breastfeeding in the hospital after birth reported that they were able to breastfeed as long as they wanted. This points to the importance of better supporting breastfeeding mothers at work, at home, and in the community," said Dr. Eugene Declercq, the survey's lead investigator.

The survey also explored birth preferences of women who planned to give birth again. While 25% would “definitely” want to give birth in a birth center that is separate from a hospital, an additional 39% would consider it. And 11% of women expecting to give birth again would “definitely” want to give birth at home, while an additional 18% would consider a home birth.

“Health policies should respond to women’s growing interest in care in freestanding birth centers, which has repeatedly been shown to safely limit unnecessary use of interventions such as labor induction, cesarean birth, and episiotomies, and avoid waste,” said Maureen Corry, Executive Director of Childbirth Connection. “Survey results lend further support to growing recognition that home birth must be better integrated into the maternity care system.”

The new survey and report, *Listening to Mothers III: New Mothers Speak Out*, followed up mothers who had previously described their pregnancies and births in the initial *Listening to Mothers III* survey. A companion report describing those results, *Listening to Mothers III: Pregnancy and Birth*, was published in May 2013. Both survey reports, questionnaires, data briefs on selected topics, and other resources are available at:

<http://transform.childbirthconnection.org/reports/listeningtomothers/>.

*Listening to Mothers III* continues a series of national surveys that explore women’s experiences from before pregnancy through many months after birth. Commissioned by Childbirth Connection, conducted by Harris Interactive, and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the newest surveys polled women who gave birth in U.S. hospitals from mid-2011 to mid-2012.

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Childbirth Connection is a national not-for-profit organization founded in 1918 as the Maternity Center Association. Its mission is to improve the quality and value of maternity care through consumer engagement and health system transformation. Childbirth Connection promotes safe, effective, and satisfying evidence-based maternity care and is a voice for the needs and interests of childbearing families. Its websites support maternity care quality improvement and system transformation (<http://transform.childbirthconnection.org>) and effective maternity care practice among consumers and clinicians (<http://www.childbirthconnection.org>).