

ONE FAMILY PEDIATRICS | CUMMING, GEORGIA

THE NORTH ATLANTA
BREASTFEEDING GAP

What CDC Data Reveals About Breastfeeding Initiation, Duration, and the Post-Hospital Support Gap in Gwinnett and Forsyth County

2026 | A Community Health Research Report by One Family Pediatrics

Expert commentary: Dr. Hiral Lavania, MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP | MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP | Breastfeeding & Lactation Medicine Specialist

Data: CDC NIS-Child Survey 2022 | CDC Breastfeeding Report Card | Georgia Department of Public Health | WHO BFHI

14,503 mothers initiate BF/year	5,270 stop before 6 months	19.5% GA exclusive BF at 6 mo	42.4% Healthy People target	0 Baby-Friendly hospitals in Forsyth County
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Atlanta mothers are starting strong. Gwinnett County's breastfeeding initiation rate of 86.3% outperforms the national average of 84.1% and significantly exceeds the Georgia state average. Forsyth County's 83.1% rate matches the Georgia average exactly. Across both counties combined, an estimated **14,503 mothers begin breastfeeding every year**.

But then something happens. The same data that reveals strong initiation numbers also reveals a dramatic and well-documented drop-off in the weeks and months that follow. Georgia's exclusive breastfeeding rate at 6 months is just **19.5%** - more than 8 percentage points below the national average of 27.9%, and nearly 23 percentage points below the federal Healthy People 2030 target of 42.4%. Applied to the two-county birth volume, an estimated **5,270 Gwinnett and Forsyth County mothers who start breastfeeding will stop before the 6-month mark** - most of them not because they wanted to, but because the support structure they needed wasn't there when they needed it.

The gap is not about intention or demographics. Forsyth County has among the highest household incomes and educational attainment rates in Georgia - the demographic profile that national data shows is most motivated to breastfeed. The gap is structural. It opens precisely when hospital lactation support ends and outpatient support has historically been hard to find. That is the gap this report examines - and the gap that One Family Pediatrics is uniquely positioned to close.

THE 5 KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1	North Atlanta mothers are initiating breastfeeding above state and national averages - but the gap to top peers is real
86.3%	Gwinnett County breastfeeding initiation rate - 2.2 percentage points above the 84.1% U.S. national average and 3.2 points above Georgia's 83.1% state average (2024 annualized data, Georgia DPH)

Gwinnett County's 86.3% initiation rate and Forsyth County's 83.1% rate reflect a community of mothers who want to breastfeed. The challenge is not initiation - it is duration and exclusivity. Georgia's exclusive breastfeeding rate at 6 months is just 19.5%, compared to 27.9% nationally. That 8.4 percentage point gap represents thousands of North Atlanta mothers each year who started breastfeeding and stopped before six months - not because they wanted to, but because the post-hospital support infrastructure failed to meet them where they were. Closing that gap requires better exclusive breastfeeding and continuation rates, not simply higher initiation numbers.

FINDING
2

Georgia's breastfeeding drop-off is among the steepest in the nation - and it starts within weeks of hospital discharge

19.5%

Georgia's exclusive breastfeeding rate at 6 months - compared to 27.9% nationally and 42.4% targeted by Healthy People 2030 (CDC NIS-Child Survey, 2022 birth cohort)

Georgia mothers start breastfeeding at above-average rates and stop at below-average rates - and the divergence is most acute in the critical first six months. CDC's NIS-Child Survey data for the 2022 birth cohort shows Georgia's exclusive breastfeeding rate at 6 months is 19.5% - 8.4 percentage points below the national average of 27.9% and 22.9 percentage points below the Healthy People 2030 target of 42.4%. Applied to the combined Gwinnett and Forsyth County population, this means an estimated 5,270 mothers who began breastfeeding will stop before six months - most in the critical weeks between hospital discharge and the first outpatient pediatric visit. The barrier is not motivation. CDC data consistently shows three structural causes: workplace pumping access, childcare accommodation, and the sharp decline in close clinical follow-up once families leave the hospital.

"Most parents will make only enough milk to feed their baby and no more. The first-line intervention is increased effective milk removal - supply is demand-driven. The challenge is that without support, the demand signals get disrupted in the exact weeks when supply is establishing."

- Dr. Hiral Lavania, MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP - on the mechanics of early breastfeeding drop-off

FINDING
3

An estimated 5,270 Gwinnett and Forsyth County mothers who start breastfeeding will stop before six months - most during weeks 2 through 12

5,270

Estimated mothers in the two-county area who discontinue breastfeeding before 6 months annually - based on Georgia's 54.6% any-breastfeeding rate at 6 months applied to 14,503 annual initiating mothers (CDC NIS-Child 2022, Georgia DPH 2024)

The arithmetic of breastfeeding discontinuation in North Atlanta is stark. Of the estimated 14,503 Gwinnett and Forsyth County mothers who begin breastfeeding each year, approximately 9,234 are still breastfeeding in any form at 6 months - and only an estimated 2,740 are doing so exclusively. That means 5,270 mothers per year discontinue before six months, and the vast majority of those discontinuations happen in the period between hospital discharge and the 12-week pediatric well visit - precisely when professional lactation support is hardest to access. In Gwinnett County alone, approximately 4,454 mothers per year fall into this window. In Forsyth County, approximately 816. National research consistently identifies weeks 2 through 8 as the highest-risk window for breastfeeding discontinuation - and it is no coincidence that this window corresponds to the exact period when most mothers have lost their hospital lactation support and not yet found an outpatient equivalent.

FINDING 4 Forsyth County has no Baby-Friendly designated hospital - a gap that affects initiation and duration rates

0 of 1

Baby-Friendly designated birth facilities in Forsyth County - compared to Gwinnett County's designated maternity facility. Baby-Friendly designation (WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative)

The 3.2 percentage point gap between Gwinnett County's 86.3% initiation rate and Forsyth County's 83.1% rate has a structural explanation. Gwinnett County benefits from its county hospital's Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) designation - requiring strict adherence to the WHO's Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, including mandatory skin-to-skin, on-site lactation specialist support, and rooming-in policies. Forsyth County's primary maternity care facility does not currently hold a Baby-Friendly designation. Research consistently shows that Baby-Friendly hospitals produce meaningfully higher breastfeeding initiation rates. Without the institutional mandate, Forsyth County's rate has normalized to the Georgia state average - despite the county's demographics strongly predicting higher performance. The outpatient period after discharge is where the gap begins to close or widen further - and this is precisely where the clinical infrastructure of One Family Pediatrics becomes relevant.

FINDING 5 The post-hospital gap is closeable - but only with the kind of IBCLC-level clinical support that is rare in outpatient pediatrics

One practice

The number of outpatient pediatric practices in Forsyth County where a mother can access IBCLC-certified lactation support embedded within her child's primary care - One Family Pediatrics

Research is unambiguous: mothers who receive IBCLC-level lactation support after hospital discharge breastfeed longer, breastfeed more exclusively, and experience significantly fewer premature discontinuations than those who do not. The evidence-based intervention is not a hotline or a pamphlet - it is in-person clinical assessment of latch, supply, and transfer by a credentialed specialist who can also evaluate the baby's weight gain and overall health simultaneously. Dr. Hiral Lavana at One Family Pediatrics is a board-certified pediatrician, International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC), and Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine Specialist. That combination of credentials in a single provider - embedded in a pediatric practice where new parents are already bringing their infants for well visits - represents exactly the kind of continuity of care that national research identifies as the most effective intervention for closing the breastfeeding duration gap.

"A correct latch should not hurt beyond a brief initial discomfort in the early days. If pain continues past those first several seconds, that is the signal to de-latch and try again. Most of the problems that cause mothers to stop breastfeeding in the first weeks are identifiable and correctable - if someone with the right training is there to identify them."

- Dr. Hiral Lavania, MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP - IBCLC, One Family Pediatrics

THE DATA: BREASTFEEDING RATES IN CONTEXT

BREASTFEEDING INITIATION RATES - LOCAL VS. PEERS (2024)

Geography	Annual Births	Initiation Rate	vs. U.S. (84.1%)	vs. Georgia (83.1%)
Gwinnett County, GA	14,050	86.3%	+2.2pp	+3.2pp
Forsyth County, GA	2,862	83.1%	-1.0pp	Equal
Combined Two-County	16,912	~85.7%	+1.6pp	+2.6pp
Georgia State Average	~130,000	83.1%	-1.0pp	-
U.S. National Average	~3.66M	84.1%	-	-
Williamson Co., TN (Nashville)	~4,200	93.2%	+9.1pp	+10.1pp
Wake Co., NC (Raleigh)	~12,950	91.5%	+7.4pp	+8.4pp
St. Johns Co., FL (Jacksonville)	~4,300	92.0%	+7.9pp	+8.9pp

THE BREASTFEEDING DURATION CLIFF - GEORGIA vs. NATIONAL (2022 BIRTHS)

Breastfeeding Metric	National Average	Georgia	Georgia Gap
Ever breastfed (initiation)	85.7%	81.1%	-4.6pp
Any breastfeeding at 6 months	62.1%	54.6%	-7.5pp
Any breastfeeding at 12 months	40.8%	35.0%	-5.8pp
Exclusive BF through 3 months	47.6%	41.0%	-6.6pp
Exclusive BF through 6 months	27.9%	19.5%	-8.4pp
Healthy People 2030 target (excl. 6 mo)	42.4%	19.5%	-22.9pp

Source: CDC NIS-Child Survey, 2022 Birth Year Data. Georgia figures from CDC state-level NIS-Child companion tables. National figures from CDC Breastfeeding Data Survey Results page (cdc.gov/breastfeeding-data/survey/results.html).

ESTIMATED LOCAL BREASTFEEDING POPULATION - GWINNETT & FORSYTH (2024)

Metric	Gwinnett County	Forsyth County	Combined
Annual births	14,050	2,862	16,912
Mothers initiating BF	~12,125 (86.3%)	~2,378 (83.1%)	~14,503
Still BF at 6 months (any)	~7,671	~1,563	~9,234
Exclusively BF at 6 months	~2,740	~558	~3,298
Stop BF before 6 months	~4,454	~816	~5,270
Baby-Friendly hospitals	1 (Northside Gwinnett)	0	-

Duration estimates apply Georgia state rates from CDC NIS-Child 2022 to local birth volumes as the most conservative available proxy. Actual Gwinnett and Forsyth rates may differ. Baby-Friendly designation data from WHO/UNICEF BFHI registry.

EXPERT PERSPECTIVE: DR. HIRAL LAVANIA, ONE FAMILY PEDIATRICS

The following clinical observations are from Dr. Hiral Lavania, MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP - board-certified pediatrician, International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC), and Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine Specialist at One Family Pediatrics in Cumming, Georgia. Her responses address the specific dynamics that drive the breastfeeding gap identified in this report.

On the most common false alarms that lead to early discontinuation:

What are the reliable clinical indicators that a baby is getting enough milk - and what misleads most mothers into thinking their supply is failing?

The reliable ones are output and growth - not pump volume or breast feel. A pump is a far less efficient extractor than a well-latched baby, so low output at the flange does not equal low supply. Common false alarms: cluster feeding, especially in the evenings or during growth spurts; a baby who wants to nurse again soon after a feed; breasts that feel softer once supply regulates around 6 to 12 weeks; and shorter feeds as the baby gets efficient. These are signs of a nursing relationship that is working - not failing.

On returning to work - the single largest driver of early discontinuation:

What does a working mother in Forsyth County need to know to successfully maintain breastfeeding when she returns to work?

Start practicing with bottle feeds 2 to 4 weeks before going back to work. Aim for an average of one pump session every 2 hours across the workday - in an 8-hour day, that usually means about 4 sessions of 15 to 20 minutes, mirroring the baby's feeding rhythm to protect supply. Frame the conversation with your employer early and matter-of-factly, put the schedule in writing, and ask for a specific room. Most importantly: do not create an oversupply by pumping excessively - this can result in mastitis. The goal is to match removal to demand, not to exceed it.

"When weaning is not your choice, the hardest part is often not the physical symptoms. It is the feeling that your body let you down, or that you let your baby down. Needing to wean is not a failure, and it is not a measure of your love or your effort. Your worth as a parent was never stored in your breast milk."

- Dr. Hiral Lavania, MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP - on the emotional dimension of the breastfeeding gap

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR NORTH ATLANTA MOTHERS

■ A strong start is not enough without a strong bridge.

Gwinnett and Forsyth County mothers are beginning their breastfeeding journeys at above-average rates. The data shows the challenge is not initiation - it is the weeks immediately after hospital discharge, when professional support is hardest to access and the breastfeeding relationship is most fragile.

■ Forsyth County's demographics predict higher performance than the data shows.

With some of the highest household incomes and educational attainment rates in Georgia, Forsyth County mothers are exactly the population that national data predicts will breastfeed at the highest rates. The county's 83.1% initiation rate - matching the state average exactly - suggests a structural gap rather than a motivational one.

■ IBCLC-level support at the pediatric well visit is the evidence-based intervention.

The weeks between hospital discharge and the 12-week pediatric well visit are the highest-risk window for breastfeeding discontinuation. A pediatrician who is also an IBCLC can assess latch, supply, and infant weight gain simultaneously - addressing the breastfeeding challenge in the same appointment where the baby's overall health is being evaluated. That integration of care is not widely available. It is available at One Family Pediatrics.

■ Finding qualified support is the first step.

If you are experiencing breastfeeding challenges, the first resource is your pediatrician. If your practice does not have an IBCLC on staff, Dr. Lavania recommends zipmilk.org to find qualified lactation support in your area.

BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT AT ONE FAMILY PEDIATRICS

Dr. Hiral Lavania is a board-certified pediatrician, IBCLC, and Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine Specialist - one of the only providers in Forsyth County who holds all three credentials in a single outpatient pediatric practice. She provides lactation consultations, latch assessment, supply evaluation, and comprehensive breastfeeding support for new mothers throughout Forsyth, Gwinnett, and surrounding North Atlanta communities.

Well visits · Sick visits · Newborn care · Lactation consultations · Immunizations · Sports physicals · CPR classes

onefamilypediatrics.com | Cumming, Georgia | Serving Forsyth, Gwinnett, and surrounding North Atlanta communities

METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

Breastfeeding initiation rates (2024): Georgia Department of Public Health, OASIS System, annualized county-level birth and breastfeeding data. Gwinnett County: 14,050 annual births, 86.3% initiation. Forsyth County: 2,862 annual births, 83.1% initiation. Georgia state average: 83.1%. U.S. national average: 84.1%.

Breastfeeding duration data (2022 birth cohort): CDC National Immunization Survey-Child (NIS-Child), 2022 birth year data. National figures: 85.7% ever breastfed, 62.1% any breastfeeding at 6 months, 27.9% exclusive at 6 months. Georgia figures: 81.1% ever breastfed, 54.6% any breastfeeding at 6 months, 19.5% exclusive at 6 months. Source: cdc.gov/breastfeeding-data/survey/results.html.

Peer county comparison: Williamson County TN, Wake County NC, and St. Johns County FL initiation rates from multi-year aggregate data and state DPH sources. Presented as approximate benchmarks for high-performing suburban counties with comparable demographics.

Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative designation: WHO/UNICEF BFHI registry, current as of 2026. Northside Hospital Gwinnett Women's Pavilion holds active Baby-Friendly designation. No Forsyth County birth facility currently holds a Baby-Friendly designation.

Local population estimates: Duration estimates apply Georgia state NIS-Child rates to local birth volumes as the most conservative available proxy. Forsyth County estimates should be interpreted with caution given the larger margin of error in state-level NIS-Child data (approximately ± 4 –6 percentage points). Healthy People 2030 target: 42.4% exclusive breastfeeding through 6 months (U.S. DHHS, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion).

Expert commentary: Dr. Hiral Lavania, MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP - Board-Certified Pediatrician, International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC), and Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine Specialist, One Family Pediatrics, Cumming, Georgia. Responses from structured expert interview, June 2026. For lactation support resources, see zipmilk.org and onefamilypediatrics.com/handouts/

One Family Pediatrics | onefamilypediatrics.com | Cumming, Georgia | Serving Forsyth, Gwinnett, and surrounding North Atlanta communities | Dr. Hiral Lavania, MD, NABBLM-C, IBCLC, FAAP - IBCLC