

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers about the Baby Friendly Health Initiative (BFHI) in Ireland

What is the BFHI?

The BFHI is a global project of the World Health Organisation and UNICEF which recognises that implementing best practice in the maternity service is crucial to the success of programmes to promote breastfeeding.

The Initiative was launched in 1991 and by the end of 2009 more than 20,000 hospitals/maternity units worldwide, including over 400 in Europe, had been officially recognised as Baby Friendly. Ireland's BFHI commenced in April 1998, all maternity units participate and eight hospitals meet the criteria for designation.

The Baby Friendly Health Initiative can be viewed as a quality initiative implementing research based best practices in a framework of health promoting practices. The successful implementation of the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding ensures that the hospital/unit develops a policy, provides training for staff, promotes informed parental choice through the provision of appropriate and accurate discussions, as well as implementing practices supportive of good mother and baby care.

How does the BFHI process work?

Firstly, a maternity hospital or maternity unit within a general hospital, decides it wants to participate in the Initiative. They complete a self-appraisal of their practices and outline the areas they wish to work on. The self-appraisal form and the plan of action are returned to the BFHI office and a *Certificate of Participation* is awarded. The hospital/unit may decide to work on their own targets for a while or to apply for the next stage. An annual report and action plan are required.

When the hospital is ready, they seek full external assessment of their practices according to the Global Criteria. If they fully meet this standard they are designated as a *Baby Friendly Hospital*. A National Level Award is given for hospitals who have the high standards but do not meet the criteria of a 75% breastfeeding rate for the international standard. The national designation is for 5 years and annual auditing is required.

The practices of the BFHI fit easily with other quality programmes and health promotion activities in health facilities. See more details on the web site.

The BFHI works most effectively at hospital level when it is part of a broader strategy and actions and includes:

- Information and training for health workers on implementing best practice
- Support to implement practices plus networks and links with other health services
- Health facility takes responsibility for self-appraisal, on-going audit and plans for continuous improvement
- External criteria and standards are used, assessment and monitoring takes place

How is the BFHI funded?

There is no fee for participation in the BFHI. Currently the costs of external assessment, and overall coordination costs are covered by funding from the HSE Health Promotion, Health and Wellbeing Division.

What if our breastfeeding rates are very low and our practices need a lot of attention?

The BFHI is a process towards supportive practices as much as the achievement of awards. Participation in the Initiative indicates the interest to make changes. A hospital does not have to answer "yes" to all the self-appraisal questions to participate.

Can a hospital receive a Baby Friendly award if paediatric and other wards are not implementing the Ten Steps?

The global BFHI focuses on maternity services. Neonatal units are included in the assessment if they are part of the maternity services. The entire hospital should conform to the BFHI goal of no acceptance of free and low cost supplies of breastmilk substitutes. In Ireland, paediatric wards have a separate assessment programme though hospitals are encouraged to have linked policies and projects. (Paediatric is not active at present)

What about mothers who do not want to breastfeed?

Parents have the right to decide how to feed and care for their babies. Hospitals and staff have the responsibility to encourage best practice and to ensure parents are given accurate, unbiased and appropriate information to allow them to make an informed choice, and to support parents to carry out their decision in the safest possible manner. Hospitals are not penalised at assessment if individual mothers indicate they have made informed choices which are not in accordance with the Ten Steps.

Step Two says "train all staff"? What does this mean?

All staff in contact with pregnant and breastfeeding women and their children should be aware of how they can support breastfeeding and the hospital policies. This includes nurses, midwives, doctors, dietitians, physiotherapists, pharmacists, administrative and ancillary staff. Staff with direct responsibility for assisting breastfeeding should have training in breastfeeding management. Staff without this training should refer mothers to trained staff. It is recommended that some staff have further specialised knowledge of breastfeeding in order to act as a resource to other staff. The BFHI in Ireland does not provide training at this time. We can discuss your training needs and refer you to sources of training expertise.

Where can we get more information on implementing supportive practices?

Each hospital that is participating in the Initiative receives regular mailings of information. *BFHI Link*, the newsletter of the BFHI in Ireland. The website www.babyfriendly.ie provides additional resources. If you need information on a specific practice, write to the BFHI Co-ordinator.

Hospitals/units are encouraged to network with other hospitals in the Initiative. Sharing of information through the *BFHI Link*, journals and other mailings, site visits, joint research projects, educational events and electronic communication are all welcomed. Hospitals/units are also encouraged to implement supportive practices to assist their own staff to continue breastfeeding after return to work.

What does the National BFHI co-ordinator and national committee do?

The national committee is a multi-disciplinary group including midwives, lactation consultants, doctors, dietitians, managers and mother to mother support group counsellors, from a variety of work settings including health promotion, hospitals, community, education and training. All areas of the country are represented. The committee's role is to facilitate implementation of the BFHI *process* including identifying hospitals that are ready for assessment, and designating status and ensuring the BFHI functions in an effective and transparent manner with good governance. The BFHI Constitution can be accessed on the website.

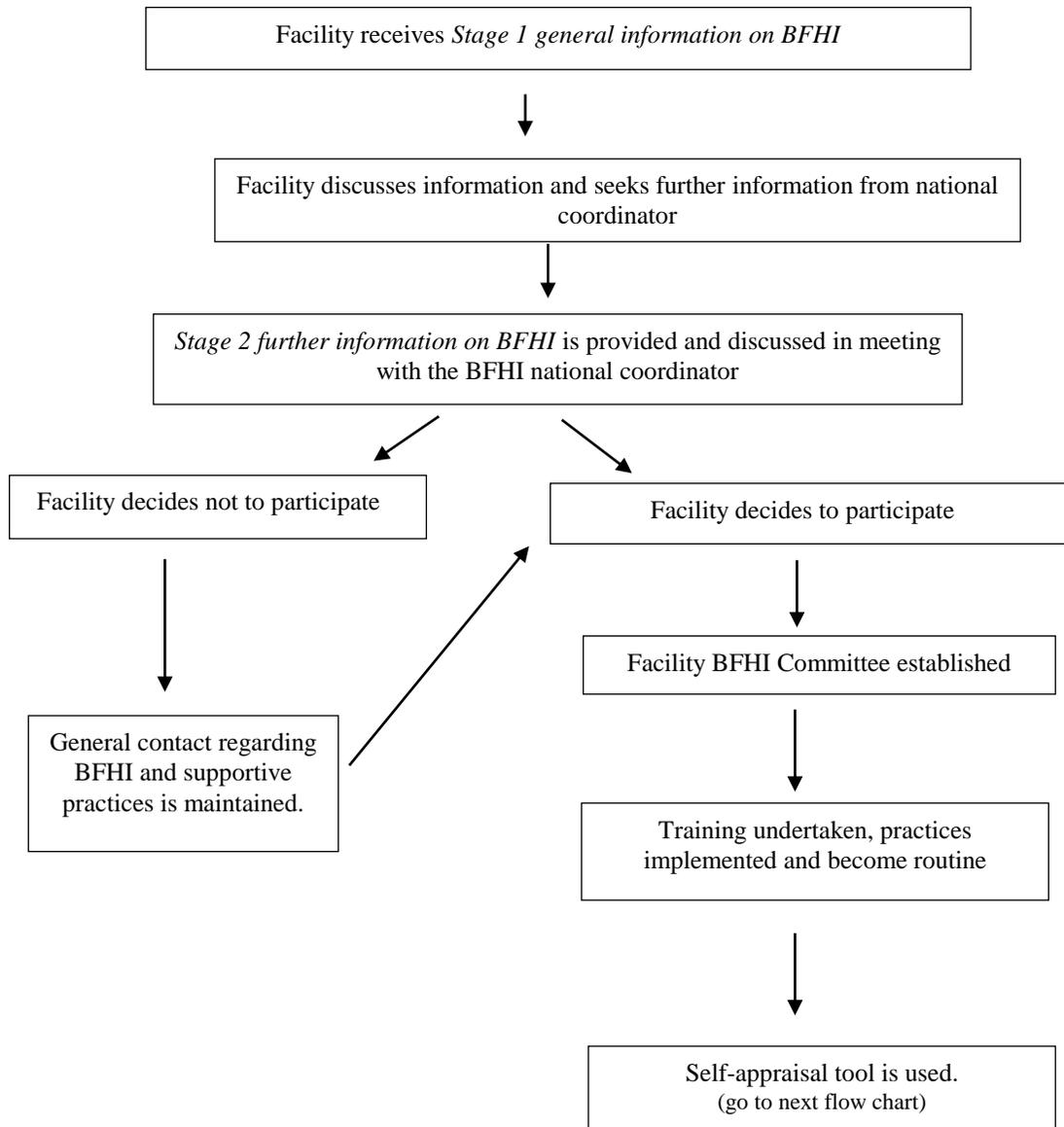
The co-ordinator of the BFHI drafts Irish adaptations of international BFHI materials, compiles reports, highlights BFHI related resources, acts as a link to BFHI internationally, organising assessments and monitoring, and generally co-ordinates the BFHI in Ireland.

How do we contact the BFHI?

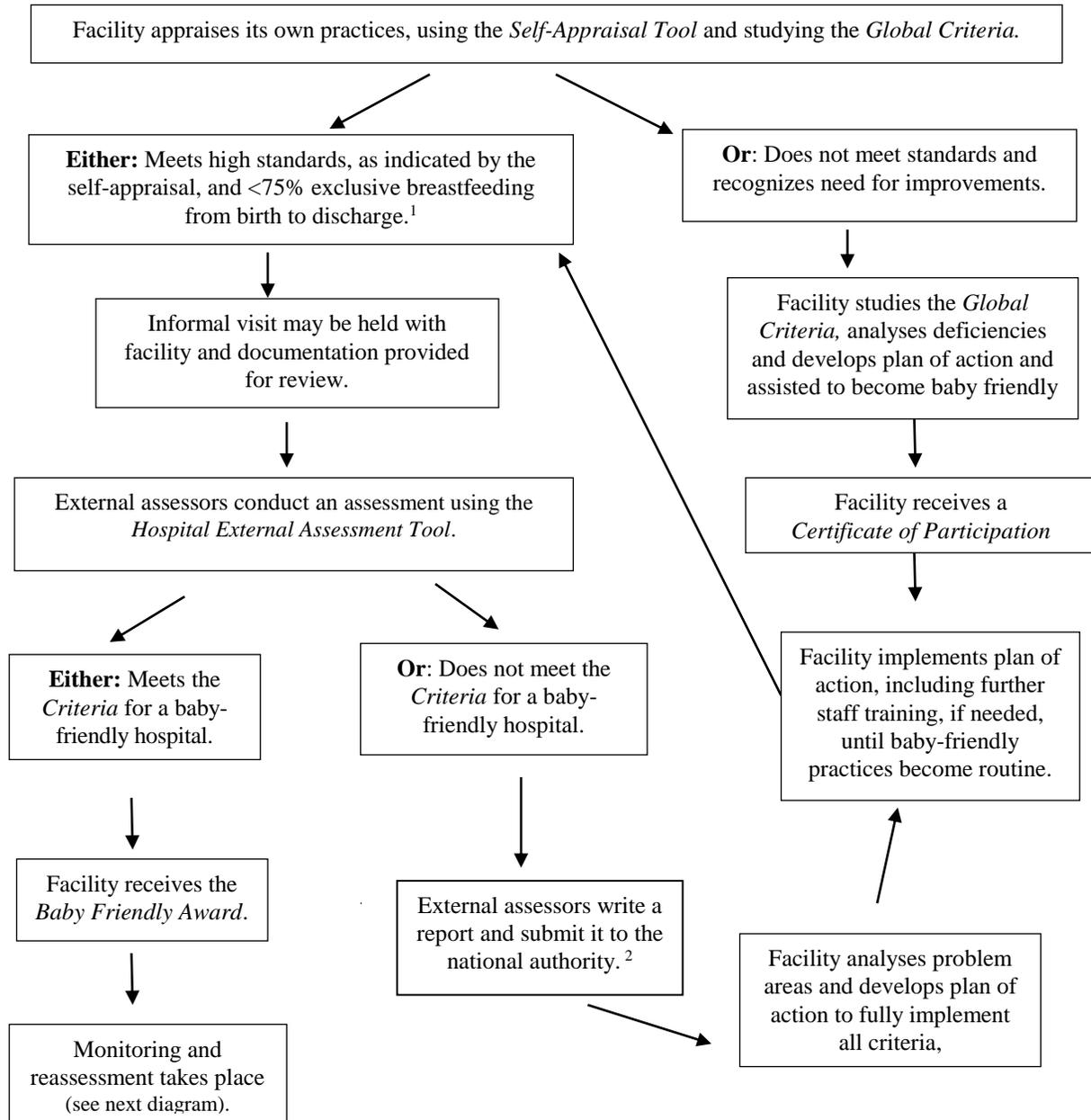
The BFHI Co-ordinator works part-time, so is best contacted by email bfhi@iol.ie. Visit www.babyfriendly.ie The postal address is c/o Health Promotion, HSE, Block 4, Central Business Park, Clonminch, Tullamore, Co. Offaly. There is no direct phone for BFHI.

THE BABY-FRIENDLY HEALTH INITIATIVE in Ireland

INTRODUCTION PROCESS



THE BABY-FRIENDLY PROCESS



Notes:

1. If an infant is not exclusively breastfeeding but it is verified that it is for an acceptable medical reason or a fully informed maternal decision, this can be counted as meeting the criterion. *Ireland provides a National Award if a hospital meets all the global criteria except the breastfeeding rate, because breastfeeding initiation is not solely within the control of the hospital to affect as community attitudes play a major part.*

2. An external assessment team does not designate a hospital as Baby-friendly. The National Authority makes the final decision after checking that the assessment results are accurate.