Dr. Marianne Neifert, a leading expert on the promotion and management of breastfeeding, is visiting hospitals and medical centers across the state to promote five key breastfeeding-friendly maternity practices that have a significant effect on the duration of breastfeeding.

Included in the list of hospitals Neifert has been visiting is Melissa Memorial Hospital in Holyoke, where she spoke with hospital staff members on April 14.

The tour is part of a statewide hospital initiative funded by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment that has been dubbed, “Colorado Can Do 5!”

The five hospital practices found to significantly impact breastfeeding continuation are listed below:

1. The infant is breastfed in the first hour after birth.

2. The infant is fed only breast milk in the hospital.

3. The infant stays in the same room with the mother in the hospital.

4. The infant does not use a pacifier in the hospital.

5. Hospital staff gives the mother a telephone number to call for help with breastfeeding after discharged from the hospital.

Jennifer Dellaport, breastfeeding coordinator for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, said, “The department is committed to sharing these five, highly doable,

supportive breastfeeding practices as a strategy to increase breastfeeding duration rates."

Neifert, co-founder and medical consultant for The Lactation Program, a long-standing nonprofit community breastfeeding center, said two-thirds of mothers participating in all five practices were still breastfeeding at four months. Yet, in 2003, only one in five Colorado mothers of healthy breastfed infants reported experiencing all five successful hospital breastfeeding practices.

Breastfeeding reaps significant benefits to the mother and child, according to Dellaport. She said the benefits to the mother include a reduced risk for type 2 diabetes, midlife metabolic syndrome and breast and ovarian cancers. In addition, during the breastfeeding process, a mom will use approximately 500 additional calories a day.

Benefits to infants include protection against gastroenteritis and lower respiratory infections. Plus, breastfed infants also have a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes and childhood obesity.

Dellaport said, "When breastfed, infants learn to eat when they're hungry and to stop when they're full. With breastfeeding, the mother begins nursing her baby when he acts hungry and stops when he seems satisfied. In contrast, a formula-fed infant is more likely to be encouraged to finish a bottle, which overrides his fullness cue and teaches him to eat when food is present, not just when he is hungry."

"Breastfeeding your baby is one of the first healthy lifestyle choices a mother makes on behalf of her child," Neifert added. "The commitment to give your infant ideal nutrition becomes the foundation for continuing to make healthy lifestyle choices throughout every stage of childhood." Neifert added.

Colorado statistics

Nearly 90 percent of Colorado mothers begin breastfeeding their

newborns after birth, an admirable rate that exceeds the national average and the CDC's national health objective for breastfeeding initiation. However, many mothers who begin breastfeeding stop nursing in the early postpartum weeks and months, with the result that Colorado's breastfeeding rates at six and 12 months fall short of national health objectives.

Strategies to prolong breastfeeding duration, such as the Colorado Can Do 5!, translate to increased health benefits for both babies and mothers and decreased health-care costs.