

Infant and young child nutrition

The Sixty-third World Health Assembly,

Having considered the report on infant and young child nutrition;¹

Recalling resolutions WHA33.32, WHA34.22, WHA35.26, WHA37.30, WHA39.28, WHA41.11, WHA43.3, WHA45.34, WHA46.7, WHA47.5, WHA49.15, WHA54.2, WHA55.25, WHA58.32, WHA59.21 and WHA61.20 on infant and young child nutrition, and on nutrition and HIV/AIDS and the Codex Alimentarius Guidelines for use of nutrition and health claims;²

Conscious that achieving the Millennium Development Goals will require the reduction of maternal and child malnutrition;

Aware that worldwide malnutrition accounts for 11% of the global burden of disease, leading to long-term poor health and disability and poor educational and developmental outcomes; that worldwide 186 million children are stunted³ and 20 million suffer from the most deadly form of severe acute malnutrition each year; and that nutritional risk factors, including underweight, suboptimal breastfeeding and vitamin and mineral deficiencies, particularly of vitamin A, iron, iodine and zinc, are responsible for 3.9 million deaths (35% of total deaths) and 144 million disability-adjusted life years (33% of total disability-adjusted life years) in children less than five years old;

Aware that countries are faced with increasing public health problems posed by the double burden of malnutrition (both undernutrition and overweight), with its negative later-life consequences;

Acknowledging that 90% of stunted children live in 36 countries and that children under two years of age are most affected by undernutrition;

Recognizing that the promotion of breast-milk substitutes and some commercial foods for infants and young children undermines progress in optimal infant and young child feeding;

Mindful of the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the difficulties in formulating appropriate policies for infant and young child feeding, and concerned that food assistance does not meet the nutritional needs of young children infected by HIV;

¹ Document A63/9.

² Document CAC/GL/23.

³ World Health Statistics, May 2010.

Concerned that in emergencies, many of which occur in countries not on track to attain Millennium Development Goal 4 and which include situations created by the effects of climate change, infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, illness and death;

Recognizing that national emergency preparedness plans and international emergency responses do not always cover protection, promotion and support of optimal infant and young child feeding;

Expressing deep concern over persistent reports of violations of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes by some infant food manufacturers and distributors with regard to promotion targeting mothers and health-care workers;

Expressing further concern over reports of the ineffectiveness of measures, particularly voluntary measures, to ensure compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes in some countries;

Aware that inappropriate feeding practices and their consequences are major obstacles to attaining sustainable socioeconomic development and poverty reduction;

Concerned about the vast numbers of infants and young children who are still inappropriately fed and whose nutritional status, growth and development, health and survival are thereby compromised;

Mindful of the fact that implementation of the global strategy for infant and young child feeding and its operational targets requires strong political commitment and a comprehensive approach, including strengthening of health systems and communities with particular emphasis on the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative, and careful monitoring of the effectiveness of the interventions used;

Recognizing that the improvement of exclusive breastfeeding practices, adequate and timely complementary feeding, along with continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond, could save annually the lives of 1.5 million children under five years of age;

Aware that multisectoral food and nutrition policies are needed for the successful scaling up of evidence-based safe and effective nutrition interventions;

Recognizing the need for comprehensive national policies on infant and young child feeding that are well integrated within national strategies for nutrition and child survival;

Convinced that it is time for governments, civil society and the international community to renew their commitment to promoting the optimal feeding of infants and young children and to work together closely for this purpose;

Convinced that strengthening of national nutrition surveillance is crucial in implementing effective nutrition policies and scaling up interventions,

1. URGES Member States:

(1) to increase political commitment in order to prevent and reduce malnutrition in all its forms;

- (2) to strengthen and expedite the sustainable implementation of the global strategy for infant and young child feeding including emphasis on giving effect to the aim and principles of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, and the implementation of the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative;
- (3) to develop and/or strengthen legislative, regulatory and/or other effective measures to control the marketing of breast-milk substitutes in order to give effect to the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and relevant resolution adopted by the World Health Assembly;
- (4) to end inappropriate promotion of food for infants and young children and to ensure that nutrition and health claims shall not be permitted for foods for infants and young children, except where specifically provided for, in relevant Codex Alimentarius standards or national legislation;
- (5) to develop or review current policy frameworks addressing the double burden of malnutrition and to include in the framework childhood obesity and food security and allocate adequate human and financial resources to ensure their implementation;
- (6) to scale up interventions to improve infant and young child nutrition in an integrated manner with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding and timely, safe and appropriate complementary feeding as core interventions; the implementation of interventions for the prevention and management of severe malnutrition; and the targeted control of vitamin and mineral deficiencies;
- (7) to consider and implement, as appropriate the revised principles and recommendations on infant feeding in the context of HIV, issued by WHO in 2009, in order to address the infant feeding dilemma for HIV-infected mothers and their families while ensuring protection, promotion and support of exclusive and sustained breastfeeding for the general population;
- (8) to ensure that national and international preparedness plans and emergency responses follow the evidence-based Operational Guidance for Emergency Relief Staff and Programme Managers¹ on infant and young child feeding in emergencies, which includes the protection, promotion and support for optimal breastfeeding, and the need to minimize the risks of artificial feeding, by ensuring that any required breast-milk substitutes are purchased, distributed and used according to strict criteria;
- (9) to include the strategies referred to in subparagraph 1(6) above in comprehensive maternal and child health services and support the aim of universal coverage and principles of primary health care, including strengthening health systems as outlined in resolution WHA62.12;
- (10) to strengthen nutrition surveillance systems and improve use and reporting of agreed Millennium Development Goals indicators in order to monitor progress;
- (11) to implement the WHO Child Growth Standards by their full integration into child health programmes;

¹ Available online at <http://www.enonline.net/resources/6>.

(12) to implement the measures for prevention of malnutrition as specified in the WHO strategy for community-based management of severe acute malnutrition,¹ most importantly improving water and sanitation systems and hygiene practices to protect children against communicable disease and infections;

2. CALLS UPON infant food manufacturers and distributors to comply fully with their responsibilities under the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly resolutions;

3. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(1) to strengthen the evidence base on effective and safe nutrition actions to counteract the public health effects of the double burden of malnutrition, and to describe good practices for successful implementation;

(2) to mainstream nutrition in all WHO's health policies and strategies and confirm the presence of essential nutrition actions, including integration of the revised principles and recommendations on infant feeding in the context of HIV, issued by WHO in 2009, in the context of the reform of primary health care;

(3) to continue and strengthen the existing mechanisms for collaboration with other United Nations agencies and international organizations involved in the process of ensuring improved nutrition including clear identification of leadership, division of labour and outcomes;

(4) to support Member States, on request, in expanding their nutritional interventions related to the double burden of malnutrition, monitoring and evaluating impact, strengthening or establishing effective nutrition surveillance systems, and implementing the WHO Child Growth Standards, and the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative;

(5) to support Member States, on request, in their efforts to develop and/or strengthen legislative, regulatory or other effective measures to control marketing of breast-milk substitutes;

(6) to develop a comprehensive implementation plan on infant and young child nutrition as a critical component of a global multisectoral nutrition framework for preliminary discussion at the Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly and for final delivery at the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board and after broad consultation with Member States.

Eighth plenary meeting, 21 May 2010
A63/VR/8

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¹ Community-based management of severe acute malnutrition: a joint statement by the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition and the United Nations Children's Fund. Geneva, WHO, 2007.