

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK 2010

UNICEF is pleased to join the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) and its affiliates, WHO and NGO partners in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2010. This year's theme, **Breastfeeding: Just 10 Steps – the Baby Friendly Way**, focuses on the vital role of health facilities in the establishment of good breastfeeding practices.

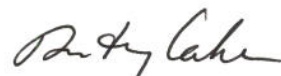
Around 8.8 million children under age five die every year¹, largely from preventable causes. According to the Lancet², optimal breastfeeding in the first two years of life can have the single largest impact on child survival of all preventive interventions. Breastfeeding has the potential to prevent 12 to 15% of all deaths among children under 5 in the developing world. Early initiation of breastfeeding (within the first hour) can reduce neo-natal mortality by around 20%³.

Globally the rate of exclusive breastfeeding is still only around 37% and the rate of early initiation is only 39%⁴. However, a number of countries, including some of the world's least developed countries, have begun to recognize the value of breastfeeding and are taking significant steps to promote it. Their successful efforts show that when countries make concerted efforts to support breastfeeding at the community level and the national level, in health facilities and homes, progress is possible even in challenging circumstances.

While the decision to breastfeed is made by families, health care facilities can and should play a vital role in promoting breastfeeding. Health care professionals in particular have the opportunity and the responsibility to provide their patients with the information they need to make healthy choices for themselves and their children. This is critical for new mothers making the decision of whether, when and how long to breastfeed.

At present, just over a quarter of maternity facilities globally have been certified as Baby Friendly⁵, complying with all ten of the recommended steps to promote breastfeeding. This year's World Breastfeeding Week is focused on making the 10 Steps the standard practice in all facilities, and to better integrate infant feeding interventions throughout national health systems.

This year's World Breastfeeding Week provides an opportunity to engage policy-makers, donors, implementing partners, health care workers and the general public in the global effort to promote the benefits of breastfeeding and give more infants the start in life they need to grow and thrive. I hope you will join this important effort.



Anthony Lake
Executive Director

¹ UNICEF. The State of the World's Children, Special Edition – Celebrating 20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Statistical Tables. November 2009, p. 11.

² Robert Black et al., Maternal and Child Undernutrition 1: global and regional exposures and health consequences. The Lancet 2008; 371(9608): 243-260

³ Edmond, K et al. Delayed Breastfeeding Initiation Increases Risk of Neonatal Mortality. *Pediatrics*. 2006

Mar; 117(3):e380-6; Breastfeeding Patterns, Time to Initiation and Mortality Risk Among Newborns in Southern Nepal. Mullany L et al. The Journal of Nutrition 138: 599-603. 2008

⁴ UNICEF. The State of the World's Children, Special Edition – Celebrating 20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Statistical Tables. November 2009, p. 15

⁵ UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative database, 2007 (incomplete data due to lack of country reports).

