



**World Health
Organization**

Statement by the Assistant Director-General
July 2010

Breastfeeding - Just 10 Steps! The Baby-friendly Way

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK 2010

The World Health Organization (WHO) is pleased to join the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week from 1 to 7 August 2010. This year's theme emphasizes the need for maternity services to follow ten basic steps to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.

The Ten Steps for Successful Breastfeeding were first set out in the joint WHO/UNICEF statement "Protecting promoting and supporting breastfeeding: The special role of maternity services" in 1989. They were operationalized as part of the WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative launched in 1992.

The Ten Steps serve as a check-list for maternity services to ensure that they are taking all of the necessary steps to support the early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding, skin-to-skin contact, no separation of mothers and babies, and the provision of ongoing support to mothers and babies after discharge.

Today there are baby-friendly hospitals in more than 150 countries implementing the Ten Steps, and thereby contributing to giving newborn babies the best start in life.

Early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding are among the most important interventions for improving newborn and child survival. Though launched almost two decades ago, the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative and the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding remain highly relevant today. Mothers who give birth at baby-friendly hospitals are much more likely to initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth and to breastfeed exclusively for six months. In addition, the Initiative has contributed to major cost savings for hospitals in developing and industrialized countries by limiting the use of infant formula and reducing newborn and childhood infections.

WHO and partners recently revised and streamlined the baby-friendly materials to help more hospitals become certified and increase breastfeeding support to mothers and babies the world over. The updated materials stress that becoming baby-friendly also means being "mother-friendly", as the needs of mothers and babies are so closely linked and should be addressed in concert.

Over the years, WHO's Member States have adopted numerous resolutions emphasizing their full support for making hospitals baby-friendly. Most recently, at the 63rd World Health Assembly held in May this year, a resolution was adopted on infant and young child nutrition which urges Member States to strengthen and expedite the sustainable implementation of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding and the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.

While there is evidence that breastfeeding is on the rise in many countries, further improvement of exclusive breastfeeding rates is important for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 1 (to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) and 4 (to reduce child mortality), and will be a key component of the plan to scale-up nutrition actions requested by the World Health Assembly.

Let this year's World Breastfeeding Week mark the next step that we take together towards meeting those goals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ala Alwan".

Dr Ala Alwan
Assistant Director-General
Noncommunicable Diseases
and Mental Health