

## WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK 2011

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 2011.

Breastfeeding has an enormous impact on the health and well-being of the world's most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Infants who are exclusively breastfed are less likely to suffer from diarrhea, the second biggest killer of children in the world. No other preventive intervention is more cost effective in reducing the number of children who die before reaching their fifth birthdays. Among many other significant health benefits, children who have been breastfed in the critical first two years of their lives are less likely to suffer from stunting, chronic early under-nutrition that causes irreversible damage to children's physical and cognitive development.

Fortunately, thanks to greater global attention and the work of so many advocates, exclusive breastfeeding rates are on the rise in the developing world. Analysis of data from 86 developing countries shows that exclusive breastfeeding rates have increased in two-thirds of these nations.

This is significant progress, but it is far from universal. In fact, in 2010 only 36 per cent of children under six months were exclusively breastfed in developing countries, leaving millions of infants at risk. In some nations, exclusive breastfeeding rates have remained flat; in others, they have even fallen.

With so much at stake, we need to do more to reach women and families with a simple, powerful message: Breastfeeding can save your baby's life. The focus of this year's World Breastfeeding Week is on reaching out to young people with critical information about the importance of breastfeeding, even before they become parents.

This focus was suggested by some young people who felt that current methods for communicating critical information on breastfeeding don't take advantage of newer ways of reaching mothers and families. Today mobile phones, rapid SMS texting and social networking make it easier to reach even the most remote and disadvantaged communities, and to engage women, families and young people more directly in the effort to improve their own lives. These innovations can help us to communicate critical information and guidance about breastfeeding to the communities in greatest need – and we should use them.

UNICEF joins the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action in calling on our partners to make fuller use of these innovative techniques, and to target greater effort and investment on reaching more women, families and communities with critical information about breastfeeding – this World Breastfeeding Week, and the whole year round. Together, we can help more children survive and thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Lake', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Lake  
Executive Director