



Celebrating World Breastfeeding Week 2013

Breastfeeding support: close to mothers

1 to 7 August 2013

The World Health Organization (WHO) is pleased to join partners in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week from 1 to 7 August 2013. This year's theme "Breastfeeding support: close to mothers" stresses the need to provide support to mothers so they can initiate, establish and maintain optimal breastfeeding practices.

Breastfeeding supports healthy growth and development. Newborns, infants and young children survive and thrive when they are fed breast milk. Optimal breastfeeding practices—early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and appropriate complementary feeding with continued breastfeeding up to 2 years or beyond—are among the most effective interventions to protect children from common causes of death, including complications from prematurity, newborn infections, pneumonia and diarrhoea. There are also numerous long-term health benefits: people who were breastfed as babies are less likely to be overweight/obese later in life, they may have a reduced risk of diabetes, and perform better in intelligence tests.

Recognizing the critical importance of nutrition for health and development, WHO's Member States unanimously endorsed the *Comprehensive implementation plan for maternal, infant and young child nutrition* at the 65th World Health Assembly in May 2012. The plan stipulates that by 2025, at least 50% of babies around the world should be exclusively breastfed. Currently, only about 38% of infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed. Increasing support for breastfeeding is therefore a public health imperative.

WHO is committed to supporting countries to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, including through breastfeeding promotion, as it contributes to MDGs 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) and 4 (reduce child mortality). Moreover, the past year has been marked by unprecedented commitment to child health and survival. The call for action that accompanied the *Promise Renewed* initiative launched in June 2012 has been met with resounding endorsement by world leaders who have pledged to reduce child mortality to 20 deaths per 1000 live births or less by 2035. This ambitious new goal can be reached, provided there is high coverage of key interventions, including improving breastfeeding practices.

For breastfeeding to be successful, mothers need support. Greater efforts are needed to create environments that consider the needs of pregnant and lactating women. WHO advocates, with the International Labour Organization, for strong support to working mothers in the formal and informal sectors. They need adequate maternity leave and, upon return to work, they need to be able to breastfeed their babies, in line with ILO Convention 183. Mothers also require a strong support network, including peer counsellors, who are equipped to give attention to the woman as well as the baby.

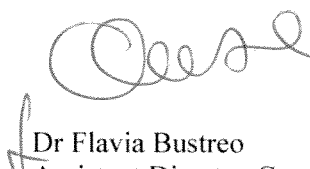
WHO will continue to play its part. Our unique contribution includes country support to adapt, implement and monitor implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent related World Health Assembly Resolutions; support for implementation of baby-friendly care through the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative; and the development and

dissemination of materials for training health workers on breastfeeding counselling. In addition, WHO supports countries to assess their situation, adapt the *Comprehensive implementation plan for maternal, infant and young child nutrition* to their context, and monitor progress towards the plan's targets including through accountability frameworks that many countries have adopted in response to the recommendations of the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health.

WHO remains firmly committed to protecting and promoting breastfeeding and supporting mothers all around the world to give their babies the best start in life. On the occasion of World Breastfeeding Week 2013, we urge governments, partners, and society-at-large, to vigorously revitalize their efforts to advance breastfeeding, for this and future generations.



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