



Celebrating World Breastfeeding Week 2014: Scoring the winning goal for life!

The World Health Organization (WHO) is pleased to join partners in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week. This year's theme helps us to remember the importance of breastfeeding for a child's healthy growth and development. Breastfeeding is the first, and single most important, public health intervention for all newborns, infants and young children with a lifelong impact on health and survival. The theme also reminds us that to enable a mother to breastfeed, she needs to be supported by a team that involves family, community, health care professionals with specific skills in breastfeeding support, policy makers and champions.

Quality care of mother and newborn, especially around the time of childbirth and in the first week of life, has a major impact: it will save maternal and newborn lives and prevent stillbirths. Currently, 44% of all under-five mortality occurs in the first month of life. Small babies are at greatest risk of dying and 80% of newborn deaths occur among premature or small for gestational age babies born in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Breast milk is the best food for these babies.

In order for mothers and families to practice optimal breastfeeding practices, teamwork is required. Health care professionals, especially midwives, will help determine the success, or failure, of breastfeeding and the subsequent health of the newborn throughout the life course. Immediate skin-to-skin contact and early initiation of breastfeeding within the hour after childbirth is essential. Postnatal care must also be provided, ensuring support for exclusive and continued breastfeeding. Home-based support by community health workers, specifically trained in breastfeeding support, during pregnancy, in the first weeks after childbirth and beyond is also effective.

Social and cultural beliefs that consider breastfeeding the norm and the adoption and enforcement of conducive policies are all necessary. In this respect, the implementation of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*, the *Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative* and *Maternity Protection Legislation* conforming to International Labour Organization Convention 183 are clear examples of policies for which much more progress must be made.

The *Comprehensive implementation plan for maternal, infant and young child nutrition* and the *Every newborn: an action plan to end preventable deaths* endorsed by WHO Members States in the 66th and 67th World Health Assembly, respectively, call for the achievement of global targets related to breastfeeding. Among these are a global increase of exclusive breastfeeding to at least 50% by 2025 and to pay more attention to early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding. The World Health Organization is committed to support countries to achieve these targets, by integrating the strategic objectives stipulated in the nutrition action plan in national health strategies and facilitating integrated service delivery.

At present, 179 countries have pledged *A Promise renewed* to end preventable maternal, newborn and child mortality within a generation. These goals will only be achieved when essential interventions are implemented at high levels of coverage. Optimal breastfeeding practices are among the most effective in preventing newborn and child deaths. Our joined efforts will score the winning goal for life!

A blue ink signature of Dr Oleg Chestnov, written in a cursive style.

Dr Oleg Chestnov
Assistant Director-General
Noncommunicable Disease and Mental Health

A blue ink signature of Dr Flavia Bustreo, written in a cursive style.

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