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WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
World Breastfeeding Week 2018 Message

Every year, countries around the world observe World Breastfeeding Week for a good reason: breastfeeding is one of the most effective ways to provide children everywhere with the best start to life. This year, the World Health Assembly embraced the annual celebration of World Breastfeeding Week by Member States as a valuable way to advocate for the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding everywhere.

The theme of this year's World Breastfeeding Week is “**Breastfeeding: Foundation for Life**” — a recognition of the importance of breastfeeding to a baby's future.

Establishing exclusive breastfeeding — feeding infants nothing but breastmilk for the first six months of life — helps young children grow, preventing undernutrition, promoting brain development, and reducing the risk that children will become overweight.

Breastfeeding is also a newborn's first vaccine, providing vital antibodies and an immunity boost.

From the earliest moments of a child's life, breastfeeding can mean the difference between life and death. Putting newborns to the breast within the first hour of life safeguards against newborn deaths. In fact, improving breastfeeding practices could save the lives of 823,000 children under age five every year.

And in emergency settings, when communities are faced with limited access to clean water and basic health services, breastfeeding guarantees a safe, nutritious and accessible food source for infants and young children, while shielding them from disease.

Despite these clear benefits, many children are missing out. Globally, only about two out of five of all newborns are put to the breast within an hour of birth — and only 40 per cent of children under six months of age are exclusively breastfed.

There are many reasons why millions of women are unable to start and continue breastfeeding successfully.

For example, many women give birth without access to the quality care, counselling and support they need from health workers. Others are given infant formula or other substitutes in maternity facilities, when they could be breastfeeding.

We must find new ways — and new political will — to help these children, wherever they live, benefit from the lifesaving benefits of breastfeeding.

A 2018 scorecard released by the Global Breastfeeding Collective — a partnership of more than 20 international agencies and non-governmental organizations co-led by UNICEF and WHO — calls for more action and investment in a number of areas.

These recommendations include increased funding for comprehensive breastfeeding programmes, better monitoring systems to track breastfeeding trends, strengthened maternity

and paternity leave provisions that encourage breastfeeding, and improved breastfeeding counselling and support in health facilities.

Breastfeeding is indeed the foundation for life and gives growing children a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to grow and develop to their full potential.

As we mark this year's World Breastfeeding Week, let us also recommit to doing more to help every child, everywhere, realize the lifesaving benefits of breastfeeding, no matter where they live.



Henrietta H. Fore



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