

U.N., WHO urge Vietnamese mothers to breastfeed

(TN-HCMC) The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in Vietnam are urging Vietnamese mothers to breastfeed their infants in the wake of the recent tainted milk scandal out of China.

To date, melamine-tainted milk products have killed four infants and sickened some 53,000 children in China.

In a joint statement issued yesterday, the WHO and UNICEF said breast milk is better for infants than any formula.

"This shocking incident has highlighted that the safest and healthiest choice parents can make is to breastfeed infants," said Dr. Jean-Marc Olivé, WHO representative for Vietnam.

"Parents should be made aware that infant formula can be tainted or contaminated during its manufacture, preparation and use. Exclusive breastfeeding up to six months is the greatest gift a mother can give," he said.

"The actions of the perpetrators have led to loss of life and placed children's growth and development at risk," said Jesper Mørch, representative of UNICEF Vietnam.

Recent studies show that only 17 percent of Vietnamese infants are breastfed exclusively in the first six months of life, according



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Dr. Jean-Marc Olivé (L), WHO representative for Vietnam, and Dr. Marjatta Toivanen - Ojutkangas, Chief of Health and Nutrition, UNICEF Vietnam at a news conference in Hanoi yesterday

to the release.

Additionally, breastfeeding within one hour of birth is initiated just 58 percent of the time. It is common in Vietnam to give water, formula or a sugar fluid to infants soon after delivery.

In recent years, there has been an increase in bottle-feeding for infants in the nation. Up to 80 percent of Vietnamese children are fed other types of food and liquid before six months of age.

The WHO has offered technical support to Vietnamese authorities who began investigating milk products in the country last week.

According to local health watchdogs, milk products imported from China are being tested throughout Vietnam for the industrial chemical melamine.

The substance, normally used for making plastics, can cause kidney stones and lead to kidney failure. No national or international authorities approve any level of melamine for human consumption.