

BREASTFEEDING – UNICEF’S CALL TO ACTION

In September 2002, UNICEF endorsed the “Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding” as the foundation for our actions in support of optimal infant and young child feeding for survival, growth and development of children worldwide. Our efforts recognise children’s and families’ rights and responsibilities and include suggested proven activities for advocacy and support of government and non-governmental actions at three levels:

1. Support a Multi-Sectoral National Commitment by Encouraging the Development of:

- National breastfeeding/complementary feeding authority and a multi-sectoral national committee
- Policy, protocols and standards on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) in the context of national policies, programming, and professional health organisations
- Advocacy materials addressing policy and legislation, new and ongoing, to all relevant groups, such as health workers, political leadership, stakeholders and partners.
- Legislation and enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, subsequent relevant WHA Resolutions, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Maternity Protection Convention
- New legislation or other suitable measures

2. Enhance Implementation of Health Services and Training Reform (Baby-Friendly Health Care). Develop and Maintain Baby-Friendly Health Care (BFHC) by:

- Supporting full implementation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) in all maternity services, including Step 10, which is the development of community activities to support the breastfeeding mother.
- Advocating and providing technical assistance in the development of standards for BFHC, and for their inclusion into the National Health Information Systems.
- Reviewing all health system contacts to ensure that each contact includes age-appropriate feeding support for mother and child.
- Providing technical assistance for revision of pre-service training curricula to include appropriate breastfeeding and complementary feeding support skills, and appropriate job-aids to support improved healthcare practices at all levels.
- Including support for birth spacing of at least 3 years for the health and survival of mother and child (preferably 3-5 years) in all programs.

3. Provide Support for Communications/Community/Social Advocacy Programming by:

- Encouraging emphasis on community social support for the mother.
- Encouraging the mother’s ability to refer for medical support when needed, and on family and societal support for an optimal infant and young child feeding norm and at least three years birth spacing.

BREASTFEEDING – ACTION IDEAS FOR YOU

HOSPITALS AND MATERNITY FACILITIES

- Assess birthing sites – what are the barriers to normal breastfeeding initiation? Develop action plans to address any barriers that are identified.
- Encourage all facilities to keep records on whether or not initiation proceeds in the first hour
- Carry out monthly “rounds” on early breastfeeding initiation to consider what can be done programmatically and practically to improve the rates.
- Implement the newly revised Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.
- Review the impact of birthing practices on breastfeeding initiation so that disruptive practices can be modified.

HEALTH WORKERS

- Teach birth attendants in health facilities and in the community how to facilitate breastfeeding initiation in the first hour.
- Review curricula of health providers and traditional birth attendants related to labour, birth and breastfeeding to assure that information about this important step is included.
- Support at least ONE mother a day!

POLICY MAKERS

- Encourage maternities, health ministries and other influential bodies such as United Nations agencies and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organisations to include timing of breastfeeding initiation as an indicator of best practices in maternal child care.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- Provide education to families regarding the importance of breastfeeding during pregnancy and soon after birth. Include grandmothers and other influential family members in this discussion.
- Identify the natural community leaders and communicators as persons who can bring this message to every woman and man, young and old, to support mothers in breastfeeding initiation and exclusive breastfeeding.
- Enlist the popular press in bringing the message to the people. Give ONE coverage per month for breastfeeding!