

PRESS RELEASE

Health facilities are vital in promoting good breastfeeding practices, says UNICEF

NEW YORK, 30 July 2010 – In World Breastfeeding Week, UNICEF and its partners are asking health professionals to encourage new mothers to breastfeed their children.

“Breastmilk is the best food a baby can have and breastfeeding gives a child the best possible start in life,” said Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF.

The information that mothers receive from healthcare providers exerts a strong influence on their attitudes to breastfeeding. Healthcare professionals can play a vital role in encouraging new mothers to breastfeed their newborns.

While the benefits for children are beyond question, the global rate of exclusive breastfeeding is still only around 37 per cent. UNICEF is working with Governments and partners to increase support and encouragement for breastfeeding mothers, including by health workers, counsellors, mother-to-mother support groups, employers, relief workers in emergencies, legislators, community social networks and families. A number of countries, including some of the world’s least developed countries, have shown that significant progress is possible.

The theme for World Breastfeeding Week 2010 (1-7 August), promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) and UNICEF is *Breastfeeding: Just 10 Steps – the Baby Friendly Way*.

The 10 steps, first promulgated by WHO and UNICEF in 1989, call on every facility providing healthcare for pregnant women, new mothers and newborns to:

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff.
2. Train all health care staff in skills necessary to implement this policy.
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding.
4. Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within 30 minutes of birth.
5. Show mothers how to breastfeed, and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infants.
6. Give newborn infants no food or drink other than breast milk unless medically indicated.
7. Practice rooming in - allow mothers and infants to remain together - 24 hours a day.
8. Encourage breastfeeding on demand.
9. Give no artificial teats or pacifiers (also called dummies or soothers) to breastfeeding infants.
10. Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer mothers to them on discharge from the hospital or clinic.

UNICEF’s experts believe the 10 Steps should be the standard practice in all maternity facilities. Breastfeeding support in maternity facilities should also be complimented by primary health care, community and workplace support to reach mothers beyond their first few days in the maternity ward and information for mothers who deliver their babies at home.

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World Breastfeeding Week

World Breastfeeding Week was first celebrated in 1992 and is now observed in over 120 countries by UNICEF and its partners, including the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) and WHO. The aim is to promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life which yields tremendous health benefits, providing critical nutrients, protection from deadly diseases such as pneumonia and fostering growth and development. Continued breastfeeding after six months, for up to two years of age or beyond, combined with safe and appropriate complementary feeding, is the optimal approach to child feeding.

Breastfeeding Advocacy package

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organizations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide. WABA has an advocacy package and website available at: <http://www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org>

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

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