Breastfeeding Policy
Protect, promote & support breastfeeding

What every health worker needs to know about breastfeeding

Health Secretary’s Circular No. 10/2009 to all Provincial Advisers, Chief Executive Officers of Hospitals and all health workers

Breastfeeding is the standard way of providing ideal food for infants and also has important health benefits for mothers.

1. The National Department of Health (NDoH) has endorsed the global public health recommendation for infants to be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health.

2. Thereafter, to meet evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond. NDoH directs that this recommendation on optimal infant feeding be implemented in all health facilities.

3. Since commercial baby goods compete directly with breastfeeding, promotion of such foods is not allowed in any health facility.

4. No health worker shall request or accept samples, gifts or other benefits of whatever value from any manufacturer or distributor of commercial baby foods or baby food supplies.

5. No health worker shall encourage company representatives to have direct or indirect contact with pregnant women, mothers or members of their families.

6. All health facilities shall implement this circular and inform health workers of their duties and responsibilities. The monitoring and enforcement of this Circular and the existing Baby Feed Supplies (Control) Act 1977 (Amended 1984) in health care facilities shall be the responsibility of the Provincial Health Advisers and the Chief Executive Officers of hospitals who shall report any infringement directly to NDoH.

Dr. Clement Malau
Secretary of Health
1. The following policy shall apply to all health facilities that serve women, infants and young children:

A) These health facilities shall recommend and facilitate exclusive breastfeeding for six months followed by continued breastfeeding for two years or longer. Exclusive breastfeeding means that babies receive nothing but breast milk, not even water for the first six months of life.

B) The rationale for this recommendation is that:
   - No infant formula or other commercial baby food contains the perfect combination of proteins, carbohydrates and fats to enhance infant growth and brain development as breast milk does.
   - No infant formula or other commercial product is as safe to administer as breastfeeding.
   - And no infant formula is as affordable to families as breast milk, which provides the perfect nutrition for infants while protecting them from infections.

C) Infants shall only be given safe and appropriate complementary food after six months of age and such foods should preferably be local foods plus foods from the High Energy Good Group (e.g. coconut cream, cooking oil, margarine) to satisfy the infants energy needs.

D) Working mothers who cannot breastfeed during working hours can express breast milk and save it in a clean container for feeding the child while they are away. Breast milk can be stored safely for up to eight hours at room temperature even in hot climate. The mother should breastfeed normally when she returns home so that her supply is maintained. If kept in the fridge, breast milk can be safely stored for up to 24 hours. Public servants and some employees in the private sector are entitled to time off to breastfeed their infants. In the public sector this entitlement is for two half-hour breaks or a one-hour break per working day for the first six months in addition to the mother’s normal meal breaks.

E) Health care facilities may not request, accept, distribute or use donations of free or low-cost supplies of infant formula, follow-up formula, complementary foods such as cereals or any other product marketed or otherwise represented as suitable for feeding infants up to the age of two years. This is to protect breastfeeding. In very exceptional cases, where these products are required, the family of the infant concerned or the hospital will be expected to purchase the necessary products and all precautionary measures and support must be provided by the health facility staff to minimize risks associated with artificial feeding.

F) Feeding bottles, teats, pacifiers and any other infant feeding aid shall continue to be made available only on prescription by registered health workers according to the Baby Feed Supplies (Control) Act 1977 (Amended 1984). Health workers must use Form 1 of the Schedule to the Act when issuing any authorization and ensure that the conditions
under Article 3 (2) of the Act are met. Cup feeding is always more hygienic than bottle feeding and the infant will not get ‘nipple confused’.

G) No health facility shall be used for the purpose of promoting feeding bottles, pacifiers, infant formula, follow-up formula, and complementary foods such as cereals or any other product marketed such as cereals or any otherwise represented as suitable for feeding infants under the age of two years.

2. Since it has come to the attention of the NDoH that certain baby food companies have engaged in the promotion of their products in health facilities in some provinces, the following must be strictly enforced. No health worker shall:

A) Accept any gift, contribution or benefit – financial or otherwise – of whatever value (including free meals) from company representatives;
B) Accept or give to any person samples or supplies of commercial products mentioned above;
C) Permit company representatives to have direct or indirect contact with pregnant women, mothers or members of their families;
D) Be engaged in any capacity for any duration of time by anyone for the performance of any duty whatsoever without first resigning from the employ of a health care facility or any government department.
E) Demonstrate the use of commercial products mentioned above except to individual mothers or members of their families in very special cases of need. In such cases there shall be a clear explanation about –
   • The hazards of the use of the product;
   • Instructions for the proper preparation and use of the product including cleaning and sterilization of feeding utensils;
   • How to feed infants with a cup;
   • The health risks of bottle feeding and improper preparation of the product
   • The approximate financial cost of feeding an infant with such a product in the recommended quantities over a certain period.

3. Exclusive breastfeeding is strongly recommended for babies of HIV-infected women for the first six months of life unless replacement feeding is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable and safe for them and their infant before that time. HIV infection should not undermine efforts to support breastfeeding for most infants as their health and survival is greatly improved by breastfeeding.