

## Fact sheet: World Breastfeeding Week



### What is Breastfeeding week about?

South Africa joins the rest of the world in celebrating breast feeding week every year from the 1st - 7th August. The aim of the week is to promote the many benefits of breastfeeding; to warn of the risks of formula feeding; to motivate the healthcare system to encourage women to breastfeed; and to promote support for mothers within their communities.

UNICEF strongly supports exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months for all children to ensure the best start in life.

### Why is Breastfeeding Important?

Exclusive breastfeeding is important for a baby's health because breast milk is the best source of perfectly balanced nutrients for newborns, and they can digest it easily. It also contains growth elements and protective properties, helping to protect a baby against illnesses such as diarrhoea, and chest and ear infections.

There's more to breastfeeding than good nourishment – it's also the ideal way for a mother to bond with her baby, as the newborn feels her warmth and hears her heartbeat and breathing. It also provides frequent eye and voice contact.

There are many benefits for mothers too, as breastfeeding lowers maternal risk of breast and ovarian cancers, as well as osteoporosis. Exclusive breastfeeding also helps with faster recovery after pregnancy.



### The importance of starting breastfeeding within the first hour of life

Research shows that if mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour, then 22% of babies who would have died within their first 28 days could be saved. This is equivalent to saving the lives of almost one million children a year. With each day that passes without initiating breastfeeding, the likelihood of death increases.

### When to Breastfeed?

Most midwives advise that mothers start breastfeeding within the first hour after birth, because delaying feeding till later can make it difficult for the baby to learn to breastfeed. The baby will determine how much milk he or she wants, and how often. As the baby grows, it will need more milk and should be allowed to suckle on demand.

Even after returning to work, a mother should be encouraged to continue breastfeeding at night, in the early morning, on weekends. For in-between times, breast milk can be expressed and left for the child minder to give to the baby.



### Supporting the mother

Health facilities should not provide artificial infant formula and bottles to breastfeeding newborns or mothers who have chosen to breastfeed, as this may lead to unstable feeding practices. Health workers should assist mothers – especially mothers who are breastfeeding for the first time – through demonstration of the correct technique to breastfeed. Soon South Africa will be publishing regulations that limit the overt advertising and marketing of infant foods and milk formula.

A study has shown that a strong approval of breastfeeding by the father is associated with a 98% of babies being breastfed, compared to just 26% when the father is indifferent about the feeding choice.

We all are responsible in ensuring that all children are given the best start in life by encouraging and promoting exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding for two years and beyond.