

Viet Nam: Early initiation of breastfeeding

Why an early start to breastfeeding matters?

- When it comes to breastfeeding, timing is everything. Newborns who are put to their mother's breast within the first hour of life are more likely to survive, while those left waiting face greater risk of life-threatening consequences.
- Those who began breastfeeding between 2 and 23 hours after birth had a **33% greater risk** of dying compared with those who began breastfeeding within one hour of birth. Among newborns who started breastfeeding 24 hours or more after birth, the **risk was more than twice as high**.



For newborns,
every minute
counts

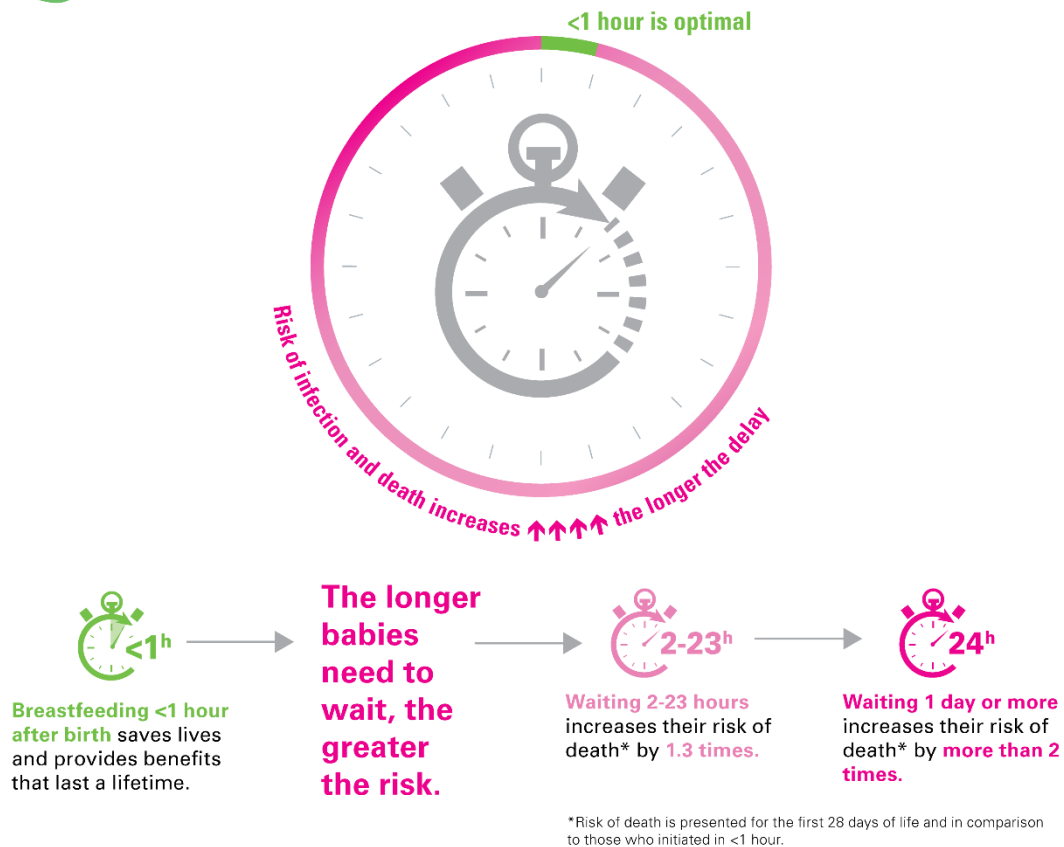


Figure 1. Visualization of the evidence about the importance of initiating breastfeeding within the first hour of life.
Source: Smith Emily R, et al. 'Delayed breastfeeding initiation and infant survival: A systematic review and meta-analysis.' PLoS ONE, vol, 12, no. 7, 25 July 2017.

Situation of early initiation of breastfeeding in Viet Nam

The rate of early initiation of breastfeeding has decreased significantly from 44 per cent in 2005 to 27 per cent in 2013. Main reasons include:

- Lack of knowledge, commitment and readiness from health workers in supporting mother with early initiation of breastfeeding.
- Increasing trend of C-session practice, which rose from 10 per cent in 2002 to 28 per cent in 2014. Half of those C-session was taken place before the onset of labour pains, meaning that those C-section were not because of medical reasons.
- Culture norm/belief in auspicious day and time that are blessed with good fortune in the future for the child.

Actions from Government

To address the challenge of this important issue, Viet Nam has taken active and timely action:

- Issuance and implementation of the National Guidelines for essential care of the mother and newborn during and immediately after normal delivery in 2014 and the National Guidelines for essential care of the mother and newborn during and immediately after a caesarean section (with support of UNICEF/WHO) in 2016. The guidelines emphasize skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth and support for the initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour after birth. Training has been provided to health staff and monitoring activities have been carried out at all provinces to ensure the effective implementation of national guideline.
- Revision and implementation of Hospital Quality Criteria and standard (with support of UNICEF/WHO) in 2015. The guideline contains a specific set of the standardized conditions and practices of health workers for maternal and new born care, which promotes early initiation of breastfeeding after delivery and ensure skin to skin contact in all obstetrical and pediatric specialized hospital and departments.
- The hospital quality assessment criteria contain Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative's Ten Standard Steps for Encouragement, Protection and Support Breastfeeding Practices within health service system. This Ten Steps, especially steps 4th to 7th, specifically aim at improving early initiation of breastfeeding within 1 hour after delivery. This is considered an innovative approach, which is widely applied in the health system with strong support from the Ministry of Health.

Initial progress made and the way forward

- According to the [Second Biennial Progress Report of Western Pacific Region on Early Essential Newborn Care 2016-2017](#), more than 80% of term babies received immediate skin to skin contact, and 73 per cent of babies received early initiation of breast feeding within one hour of birth in Viet Nam. The initial achievement has been recognized by WHO and UNICEF at the Regional Meeting on Accelerating Progress in Early Essential Newborn Care organized in August 2017.
- Viet Nam aim to achieve early breast feeding initiation rate of 85% by 2020. Much effort is needed to achieve the goals of early initiation rate by 2020 and to ensure that babies are exclusively breast fed for the first six months.