



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK 2004

Exclusive breastfeeding – the gold standard!
Safe, sound, sustainable

The World Health Organization joins partners of the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) in more than 120 countries in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week 2004. This year's theme is especially fitting and timely so close to the release of new WHO growth standards, which will establish the *breastfed infant as the norm*.

WHO is preparing new standards based on how children *should* grow in all countries rather than merely describing how they grew at a particular time and place. Following the collection of primary data from 8500 children with widely differing ethnic backgrounds in diverse cultural settings (1997-2003), the development and testing of new scientifically robust tools for assessing growth and nutritional status has begun. If the current pace is maintained, the new growth standards will be released on schedule in 2005 for adoption the world over. Health policies and public support for breastfeeding will be significantly strengthened when breastfed infants become the reference for normal growth and development.

The Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding reminds us that breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; it is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers. As a global public health recommendation, infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond. Exclusive breastfeeding from birth is possible except for a few medical conditions, and unrestricted exclusive breastfeeding results in ample milk production.

The HIV pandemic and the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV through breastfeeding continue to pose unique challenges to breastfeeding promotion, even among unaffected families. Support for HIV-positive women should include counselling about appropriate infant-feeding options.

WHO thanks WABA and its worldwide grass-roots network for their tireless efforts to promote exclusive breastfeeding, and timely complementary feeding with continued breastfeeding. Helping mothers and babies achieve the gold standard is a fine contribution to making the world a truly fit environment where all children can thrive and achieve their full potential – naturally!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jong Wook Lee', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

LEE Jong-wook
Director-General