

World Breastfeeding Week 1-7 August

***Theme: Exclusive Breastfeeding: the Gold Standard
Safe, Sound, Sustainable***

Exclusive breastfeeding is the best way to feed an infant for the first six months of life. After six months also it should continue for two years or beyond along with adequate home made indigenous complementary feeding. Breastmilk contains a range of anti-infective and other protective factors that makes breastmilk the safest food for a baby. It makes it nutritionally the soundest for a baby and also it is economical and the natural way to feed our infants and thus it is sustainable. It confirms food safety and security.

Promoting optimal infant and young child feeding practices especially exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months is the most important and effective way to reduce the level of malnutrition in our country. For the first time Government of India has included State specific goals in its 10th five year plan to improve infant and young child feeding practices to reduce Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) and malnutrition.

10.8 million children under five die in the world annually, (Lancet.361, June 28, 2003, 2226-2234) out of these 2.4 million die in India. According to WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding 2002, 2/3rd of these deaths occur during first year and are related to inappropriate infant feeding. Out of these 13-15% of lives can be saved universally if it was 90% of exclusive breastfeeding (Lancet 362, July 5, 2003, 159-164) which means around 315000 to 360000 deaths could be avoided.

Each year World Breastfeeding Week celebrates 1-7 August with a new theme to mobilize the work on breastfeeding through out the country. The theme for this year is **Exclusive Breastfeeding: the Gold Standard – Safe, Sound, Sustainable**.

According to Dr. Arun Gupta, National Coordinator of BPNI, "it is possible to achieve such high rates of exclusive breastfeeding, there is evidence to support this. What we have to do is to make available IYCF counseling as a 'service' to all families / women through 'skilled' workers".

"The theme for this year, Exclusive Breastfeeding: the Gold Standard – Safe, Sound, Sustainable is also a central theme in UNICEF's work in Health and Nutrition", says the Executive Director of UNICEF New York, Carol Bellamy.

However, we can achieve the Government of India's 10th five year plan goal if we give the support to all the women. Women have repeatedly shown that they can breastfeed exclusively, when they understand what it means, and when they get support. Mother support groups see this all the time among women who attend the groups.

This year, WBW will focus on how governments, health workers and the breastfeeding activists can have a positive impact on the structures that influence and enable women to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months and to provide optimal feeding practices for their children.

For more information contact

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