

PRESS RELEASE

World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 2007



Breastfeeding within 1 hour can save 2.5 lakh babies

NEW DELHI: Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) joins hands with UNICEF, WHO and WABA to draw the attention of all country people to join in the global appeal for protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding. It urges the people to participate in the World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) from 1 to 7 August 2007. The theme of this year is “*Breastfeeding: The 1st Hour Save One Million Babies!*”

“The theme offers an excellent opportunity to draw global attention to the important role that breastfeeding plays in improving the health of infants. It has the capacity to reduce neonatal mortality by 22% if the rate of first hour of breastfeeding increases up to 90 percent,” informed **Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF.** ¹

Early initiation of breastfeeding is the most crucial step for any newborn child to survive and can reduce the risk of neonatal deaths. Breastmilk has the best potential to help the babies grow well in later stages of childhood. This single intervention can save more than 2.5 lakh babies in India, i.e. equivalent to 22% of deaths among newborns. This year’s World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) calls for attention of policy makers, health workers, social activists, members of Panchayati Raj Institutions, individuals belonging to families and communities to create a conducive environment enabling all mothers and babies to start breastfeeding during first hour of birth. This was the step of Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) started in 1993 which, however, failed to make headway in India.

“In a world where more than 10 million children die before their fifth birthday due to preventable causes, malnutrition alone kills more than half of these children. Malnutrition is still rampant and there is simply no time to waste. Let’s start with the first hour!,” said **Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of WHO.** ²

A **UNICEF 2007** report states that India has close to 25 million children born every year. Out of these, 1.9 million are under-5 children, who die in a year. Among the deceased children, 1.4 million children die just within 1 year and roughly 1 million children die within a month. ³ Most of these deaths are associated with infant and young child malnutrition ⁴ and other preventable diseases caused mainly due to poor care and inappropriate infant feeding practices.

Only 23.4% newborns across the country begin breastfeeding within an hour of birth. This rate has to be improved up to 90% or more in order to achieve Millennium Development Goals and to fight against the malnutrition and child deaths in India. Early initiation of breastfeeding practice provides quality health care for children and reduces their specific health problems. Maximum number of child deaths occur within 1st month and 1st year of life and it is the most crucial period for the children can be safeguarded by initiating proper infant feeding practices along with adequate sustenance. WHO also recommends for optimal infant feeding practices to fight malnutrition and promote child survival.

“Mothers of newly born children don’t know what to feed and how to feed their children and end up adopting harmful practices. They don’t even know much about optimal infant feeding practices resulting in huge toll of infants. Moreover, the cultural influence and an inadequate or lack of health care support makes it worse,” informed **IBFAN Asia’s Regional Coordinator, Dr. Arun Gupta.**

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BPNI is a registered, independent, non-profit, national organisation that works towards protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding of infants and young children. BPNI works through advocacy, social mobilization, information sharing, education, research, training and monitoring the company compliance with the IMS Act. BPNI does not accept funds or sponsorship of any kind from the companies producing infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, related equipments, or infant foods (cereal foods).

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BPNI has since last 15 years been advocating on optimal Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices (IYCF) in the country and is asking all implementing intuitions and agencies to adopt IYCF plan of action for all districts and states, which was developed by BPNI in partnership with UNICEF and NIPCCD. BPNI has collaborated with a large number of individuals, health organizations, associations and NGOs, which are active in all districts and states of India, will celebrate WBW and spread the message of universalization of breastfeeding practices.

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1. UNICEF WBW 2007, WBW 2007 Statement http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/pdf/unicef_support_letter.pdf
 2. World Health Organization (WHO) WBW 2007 Statement, http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/pdf/who_support_letter.pdf
 3. UNICEF Report, The State of The World's Children 2007 <http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/>
 4. Infant and Young Child Undernutrition, Dr. Arun Gupta, Jon E. Rohde <http://www.bpni.org/cgi/epwarcile.pdf>

NOTES FOR EDITOR

Evidence on the long-term effects of breastfeeding, Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis, **World health Organisation (WHO), 2007** Geneva, Switzerland. http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/New_Publications/NUTRITION/ISBN_92_4_159523_0.pdf

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Celebrating the Innocenti Declaration on the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding Past achievements, present challenges and priority actions for Infant and Young Child Feeding. **UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Italy**
http://www.unicef.org/nutrition/files/Innocenti_plus15_BreastfeedingReport.pdf

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