



WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK 2007

Breastfeeding: The 1st Hour

The World Health Organization (WHO) is pleased to join the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week on 1-7 August 2007. This year's theme emphasizes the importance of initiating breastfeeding within the first hour of life to save children's lives.

The message, which is in line with WHO recommendations for optimal infant feeding practices, is particularly timely as we enter a key phase in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the international community mobilizes to fight malnutrition and promote child survival. Improved breastfeeding practices could avert 13% of all child deaths. Supporting immediate maternal-infant contact with early initiation of breastfeeding will contribute to the achievement of MDG 1 on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and MDG 4 on the reduction of child mortality.

WHO, as part of its six-point agenda for health, is placing renewed emphasis on primary health care as an approach for strengthening health systems and providing access to essential interventions. Strengthening the linkages between health systems and communities remains the most important and efficient means of addressing malnutrition. Early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding are key interventions to be promoted at facility and community level to achieve a further reduction in neonatal and child deaths. The Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding¹ outlines the full scope of actions needed to facilitate access to these interventions. Baby-friendly hospitals are also instrumental to implement these practices, by helping to ensure quality of care for all mothers and support breastfeeding for their children.

Specific recommendations on breastfeeding apply for women infected with HIV, as documented in a Consensus Statement endorsed in October 2006 by the Inter-Agency Task Team on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. The IATT consensus is that exclusive breastfeeding by HIV-infected women for the first 6 months of life is both safer for infants than mixed breastfeeding and an appropriate option for many women unless replacement feeding is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable and safe.

World Breastfeeding Week 2007 will mobilize partners and communities around the world to take action to improve breastfeeding. WHO reiterates its continued support to making early and exclusive breastfeeding a reality for as many children as possible. In a world where more than 10 million children die before their fifth birthday due to preventable causes, and where malnutrition is still rampant and associated with over half of all childhood deaths, there is simply no time to waste. Let's start with the first hour!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Chan".

Dr Margaret Chan
Director-General

¹ WHO Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding. Geneva, 2003. Available at: http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/NUTRITION/global_strategy.htm