

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

Breastfeeding and Family Foods: Loving and Healthy

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) joins with the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) and the countries in the Region in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week from 1 to 7 August 2005. This year's theme focuses on the importance of timely, adequate, safe, and properly fed complementary foods.

Adequate nutrition during infancy and early childhood is fundamental to the development of each child's full human potential and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Breastmilk alone is recommended for the first six months of life. However, thereafter complementary foods need to be provided along with breastmilk to sustain healthy growth. Breastfeeding is recommended for two years or beyond. The first two years of life represent a critical "window of opportunity" to promote optimal growth, health, and mental development.

Interventions to promote optimal breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices are two out of the three most effective preventive interventions available to prevent child mortality¹. Adequate breastfeeding and complementary feeding are also essential to preventing hunger and for ensuring optimal mental development and, thus, directly linked to the MDGs on hunger and educational attainment. To revitalize world attention to the impact that feeding practices have on the survival of infants and young children, the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding was endorsed by Member States at the 55th World Health Assembly in May 2002 (WHA55.24).

The Guiding Principles for Complementary Feeding of the Breastfed Child² were developed by PAHO to provide a unified scientifically-based set of guidelines for complementary feeding. Likewise, the ProPAN Manual (Process for the Promotion of Child Feeding)³ was developed to facilitate the assessment of complementary feeding practices and to use this assessment to develop, implement, and evaluate interventions. Critical interventions to improve infant and young child feeding include the implementation and monitoring of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), and the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses Strategy (IMCI), which includes nutritional assessment and counseling.

PAHO thanks WABA and its worldwide grass-roots network for their unparalleled efforts to promote optimal breastfeeding and complementary feeding. Creating a favorable policy environment, implementing cost-effective programs, and fostering networks and alliances all help to ensure that mothers and families are supported to optimally nourish their children, thus enabling all children to reach their full human potential.



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¹ Jones et al., How many child deaths can we prevent this year? *The Lancet*; 2003;362:65-71.

² www.paho.org/English/AD/FCH/NU/Guiding_Principles_CF.htm.

³ www.paho.org/EnglishAD/FCH/NU/ProPAN-index.htm.