



World Breastfeeding Week 2016

Breastfeeding: A Key to Sustainable Development

In 2015, countries around the world committed to 17 goals aimed at ending poverty, protecting the environment and ensuring prosperity for all by 2030. Together, they form the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs will influence investment and policy agendas in virtually every country on earth, improving millions of lives over the next fifteen years¹.

In 2012, the World Health Assembly endorsed a Comprehensive Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition that includes six global targets based on public health relevance. One is to increase exclusive breastfeeding to 50% by 2025². This requires a 2.3% relative increase per year globally, and would lead to approximately 10 million more children being exclusively breastfed. In the region of the Americas, there is wide variation in rates and trends in breastfeeding. In some countries, fewer than 15% of infants less than six months of age are exclusively breastfed, while in others this prevalence is more than 50%. Sustained and rapid progress is possible: through strong political commitment and action, exclusive breastfeeding rates in Peru increased from 33% to 72% between 1992 and 2013³.

World Breastfeeding Week 2016 is dedicated to demonstrating how breastfeeding, among many other actions, can support the achievement of the SDGs, and proposing actions on how to improve policies and programs for its protection, promotion and support.

Below are some key messages related to breastfeeding and actions to achieve optimal breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding prevents childhood leukemia

Breastfeeding for more than 6 months or longer compared to no or shorter breastfeeding is associated with a reduction of childhood leukemia of 19%⁴.

Breastfeeding protects against sudden infant death syndrome

Babies who are breastfed are 60 percent less likely to die from SIDS compared to those not breastfed. The effect is even greater for infants exclusively breastfed⁵.

Duration of breastfeeding is positively associated with higher income

A 30 year follow-up of a cohort captured at birth showed that adults who had been breastfed earned higher wages, an effect mediated through an increase in years of schooling⁶.

Workplace policies to support breastfeeding are good for business

Workplace policies in support of breastfeeding increase employee retention, performance, loyalty, productivity and morale^{7,8}.

Breastfeeding makes babies smarter

Adults who were breastfed as children score 3.3 points higher on cognitive development indicators, which leads to more years of schooling^{9,10}.

Breastfeeding is good for the environment

Breastfeeding leaves no carbon footprint. Breast-milk is renewable and produced and fed to the baby without pollution, packaging, or waste¹¹.

Breast milk: more than nutrition

Beyond providing perfect nutrition and protection against infection and death, constituents in breast milk likely affect epigenetic programming at a critical time when an infant's gen expression is being developed for life¹².

Breastfeeding: a public health imperative

"If a new vaccine became available that could prevent 1 million or more child deaths a year, and that was moreover cheap, safe, administered

orally, and required no cold chain, it would become an immediate public health imperative. Breastfeeding can do all this and more¹³"

Breastfeeding helps prevent overweight and type-2 diabetes in children

Longer breastfeeding reduces the risk of overweight/obesity by 13%, helping to fight chronic diseases caused by obesity. It also lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes by 35%¹⁴.

Breastfeeding protects women too

Women who breastfeed compared with women who don't breastfeed or breastfeed less have a 32% lower risk of type 2 diabetes, a 26% lower risk of breast cancer and a 37% lower risk of ovarian cancer¹⁵.

Breastfeeding needs protection

The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes provides guidelines to prevent the inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes, including infant formula, feeding bottles, nipples, follow-on milks and related products¹⁶. It needs to be legislated and monitored. When manufacturers and distributors are in violation, they should be sanctioned.

Breastfeeding promotes attachment

Mother-child bonding is enhanced when mothers interact with their infants while breastfeeding. Longer breastfeeding is associated with more sensitive maternal responsiveness and the security that comes with attachment^{17,18}.

Actions

To achieve the health and economic benefits of breastfeeding, investment in its protection, promotion and support is needed. The Breastfeeding Advocacy Initiative led by WHO and UNICEF, in collaboration with other partners, calls upon governments, donors and development partners to:

1. Increase funding to reach the 2025 World Health Assembly Target to raise the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months to at least 50 percent.

2. Fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions.
3. Enact family leave and workplace breastfeeding policies.
4. Implement the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in maternity facilities.
5. Improve access to skilled lactation counseling.
6. Strengthen links between health facilities and communities.
7. Create monitoring systems that track the progress of policies, programs, and funds toward achieving both national and global breastfeeding targets.

Conclusion

Many leaders in the public and private sector are beginning to recognize that the protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding are an investment not only in health but also in economic and social development. Whether maintaining robust breastfeeding rates or seeking solutions to improve breastfeeding practices, the efforts of individual nations will be strengthened by cooperation through global cooperation, and will ultimately benefit not only mothers and infants, but all people and our planet.

Resources

- www.paho.org/wbw
- <http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>
- <http://unicef.org/>
- <http://waba.org.my>
- www.ibfan.org
- <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
- http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/breastfeeding_advocacy_initiative/en/

Acknowledgements

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