

69th World Health Assembly – Guidance on Ending the Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children

BRIEF for SUN Government Focal Points – 17 May 2016

The 69th World Health Assembly (WHA) will take place in Geneva, Switzerland from the 23-28 May 2016. During this gathering, a resolution is being considered for endorsement on the proposed **Guidance on Ending the Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children** (hereafter referred to as “Guidance”).

This [Guidance](#) has been developed following the call made by Member States at the 63rd World Health Assembly in May 2010 to end the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children. In 2012, the Assembly requested guidance on what constituted inappropriate promotion, thus the World Health Organization (WHO) convened a Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) to provide clarification and guidance. According to the reports of the STAG, evidence from numerous countries has shown that foods are being promoted as being suitable for infants under 6 months of age, that breast-milk substitutes are being indirectly promoted through association with commercial complementary foods, and that inaccurate claims are being made that products will improve a child’s health or intellectual performance. In addition, complementary foods that represent a substantial portion of energy requirements have been shown to displace the intake of breast-milk.

The Guidance provides recommendations to end the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children from 6-36 months of age, regardless whether this promotion occurs through government programs, non-profit organizations, and private enterprises. It is not applicable to vitamin and mineral food supplements and home-fortification products such as micronutrient powders and small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements. The evidence-based recommendations help policy makers and health care officials develop policies and programmes that protect breastfeeding and optimal infant and young child feeding and help ensure that parents and caregivers have access to accurate information to make the right decisions.

Guidance on the inappropriate promotion of breast-milk substitutes is contained in the Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions. The current document does not replace any provisions in the Code but clarifies the inclusion of certain products that should be covered by the Code and subsequent resolutions.

The Guidance makes 7 recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1.** Optimal infant and young child feeding should be promoted based on the WHO [Guiding principles for complementary feeding of the breastfed child](#) and the WHO [Guiding principles for feeding non-breastfed children 6-24 months of age](#). It supports that emphasis should be placed on the use of suitable, nutrient-rich, home-prepared, and locally available foods that are prepared and fed safely.
- **Recommendation 2.** Products that function as breast-milk substitutes should not be promoted.
- **Recommendation 3.** Foods for infants and young children that are not products that function as breast-milk substitutes should be promoted only if they meet all the relevant national, regional and global standards for composition, safety, quality and nutrient levels and are in line with national dietary guidelines.

- **Recommendation 4.** The messages used to promote foods for infants and young children should support optimal feeding and inappropriate messages should not be included. Messages should always include a statement on the importance of continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond and the importance of not introducing complementary feeding before 6 months of age and, should include the appropriate age of introduction of the food (not less than 6 months). Messages should not include any image, text or other representation that might suggest use for infants under the age of 6 months or, undermine or discourage breastfeeding, make a comparison to breast-milk, or suggest that the product is nearly equivalent or superior to breast-milk. Messages should not convey endorsement unless specifically approved by regulatory authorities.
- **Recommendation 5.** There should be no cross-promotion to promote breast-milk substitutes indirectly via the promotion of foods for infants and young children.
- **Recommendation 6.** Companies that market foods for infants and young children should not create conflicts of interest in health facilities or throughout health systems.
- **Recommendation 7.** The WHO set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children should be fully implemented, with particular attention being given to ensuring that settings where infants and young children gather are free from all forms of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fats, free sugars or salt.

With support from the STAG, a discussion paper was made available for public comment from 20 July to 10 August 2015. This was followed by informal dialogues with nongovernmental organizations in relations with the WHO and private sector entities on 17 August 2015, and with an informal consultation with member States and other United Nations organizations on 18 August 2015.

The Guidance is now up for consideration by Member States at the 69th WHA. A resolution has been drafted (led by Ecuador) to endorse the Guidance. If endorsed, the resolution would encourage countries to enact legislation against inappropriate promotion of commercially produced complementary foods for children from the age of 6-36 months while still allowing promotion of complementary foods that meet standards for composition, safety, quality and nutrient level.

What can you do about it?

Get informed: Read through the Guidance to get a better understanding of how the suggested recommendations would impact the health and wellbeing of babies, young children and mothers in your country.

Get your country involved: Make sure your national representative(s) take with them your country's position and is ready to speak up! Contact those who will be representing your country at the 69th World Health Assembly and encourage them to shape a resolution that will have the best impact on the health and wellbeing of babies and young children in your country and worldwide. Ecuador will convene a second informal consultation of Member States on Friday, 20 May from 12:45 to 14:15 in Salle A of the Palais des Nations in Geneva to continue discussions on this draft resolution for consideration by Member States. Encourage them to get involved!

Learn more: We welcome you to contact Dr Laurence Grummer-Strawn, Technical Officer, Nutrition for Health and Development, WHO at grummerstrawnl@who.int.

Breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding: Facts and Figures

The inappropriate marketing of products that compete with breastmilk weaken efforts to promote and protect breastfeeding, and ultimately weaken children's health and wellbeing.

Globally only 38% of infants are exclusively breastfed¹. It is estimated that the lives of more than 820,000 children under the age of five could be saved if breastfeeding levels were increased to near-universal levels. These figures do not include the number of lives saved because of non-communicable diseases that could be avoided, nor the related treatment costs that could be saved.

Meanwhile, global sales of breast-milk substitutes total US\$ 44.8 billion per year and are expected to rise to US\$ 70.6 billion by 2019, according to the Lancet breastfeeding series².

The 2016 WHO, UNICEF, the Infant Baby Food Action Network report was recently launched: [Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes: National Implementation of the International Code. Status Report 2016](#) documents the current status of legislation on the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

Poor complementary feeding practices are a concern in many low and middle income countries where malnutrition is a public health issue. The State of the World's Children (2015) reported that 35% of children are introduced to solid, semi-solid or soft foods before 6 months³.

¹ WHO. [Global Nutrition Targets 2025: Breastfeeding Infographic](#).

² Victora, Cesar, G., et al., 'Breastfeeding in the 21st Century: Epidemiology, mechanism and lifelong effect', The Lancet, 2016, vol. 387, pp. 475-490; and Rollins, Nigel, C., et al., 'Why Invest, and What it Will Take to Improve Breastfeeding Practices?', The Lancet, 2016, vol. 387, pp. 491-504.

³ UNICEF (2015) The state of the world's children 2015. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_77928.html