

Rationale for WHA resolution on infant and young child feeding, 2018

GENERAL BACKGROUND:

The importance of breastfeeding is well-recognized by all countries. Substantial research has confirmed that breastfeeding improves the health, development and survival of infants, children and mothers. Literature published in the Lancet in 2016 showed that improving breastfeeding practices could save over 820 000 children's lives a year. Nearly half of diarrhoea episodes and one third of respiratory infections are due to inadequate breastfeeding practices. Longer breastfeeding is associated with a 13% reduction in the likelihood of overweight and/or prevalence of obesity and a 35% reduction in the incidence of type 2 diabetes. An estimated 20 000 maternal deaths from breast cancer could be prevented each year by improving rates of breastfeeding.

WHO and UNICEF recommend that breastfeeding be initiated within the first hour after birth, continued exclusively for the first 6 months of life and continued, with safe and adequate complementary foods, up to 2 years or beyond. Globally, a minority of infants and children meet these recommendations: only 44% of infants initiate breastfeeding within the first hour after birth and 40% of all infants under 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed. At 2 years of age, 45% of children are still breastfeeding.

In the Spring of 2018, WHO and UNICEF launched new implementation guidance on the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative, a programme designed to incentivize maternity facilities to adopt the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding. The programme has traditionally focused on designation or certification of facilities that adhere to the Ten Steps, but coverage of the programme has fallen to just 10% globally. The new guidance recommends a more integrated approach to ensure that the Ten Steps become a routine standard of quality health care implemented throughout the health care system. The WHA resolution mentioning the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative was over a decade ago (WHA 59.21), so a call for reinvigoration is needed.

WHA 61.20 (2008) urged Member States to scale up efforts to monitor and enforce national measures on the Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. A 2016 report documented that few countries have functional monitoring systems. In October 2017, WHO published a new toolkit to assist Member States with Code monitoring. The toolkit includes a protocol for periodic assessment of current marketing activities and a protocol for building ongoing monitoring systems. A new WHA resolution would call upon Member States to utilize the toolkit to strengthen their data collection and enforcement of the Code.

New operational guidance on infant and young child feeding in emergencies was published in October 2017, by WHO and partner agencies. Given the increasing frequency of humanitarian crises and emergencies and the importance of optimal infant and young child feeding to protect against mortality and morbidity, it is critical that Member States take action to protect recommended infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices and minimise risks in the early stages of an emergency.

The WHO Guidance on Ending Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children left open many questions about the rationale for each recommendation and clarification on how the recommendations should be interpreted. WHA 69.9 requested that WHO provide technical support

to Member States in implementing the guidance recommendations. In 2017, WHO published an implementation manual to address these questions.

PURPOSE OF 2018 71WHA RESOLUTION:

1. To make Member States aware of the new guidance documents and tools produced by WHO Secretariat in carrying out the comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition and encourage their use in countries
2. To express concern about the vast numbers of infants and young children who are still inappropriately fed and whose nutritional status, growth and development, health and survival are thereby compromised.
3. To scale up interventions to improve infant and young child nutrition in an integrated manner with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.
4. To recognize breastfeeding substantial contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.
5. To strengthen nutrition surveillance systems in implementing effective nutrition programmes and policies
6. To recall Para: 54 of draft WHO's 13th General Programme of Work: "...The WHO Secretariat will work with national authorities and partners to ensure that essential life-saving health services, including health promotion and disease prevention, mental health and psychosocial support, and nutrition services including support for exclusive breastfeeding, reach the people most in need."
7. To request further assistance from WHO in putting the various recommendations and tools into action.
8. To ensure mainstreaming nutrition in all WHO's health policies and strategies.
9. To encourage further collaboration among UN agencies.