



WHO's 150th Executive Board Meeting

IBFAN Statement on Strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies. See WHO [webcast Session 6](#) Agenda Item 15.1

Wednesday 26th January (Morning) Delivered by Dr Magdalena Whoolery

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important item. For over 40 years, IBFAN, the global network of working in over 160 countries, has alerted WHO and Member States to the need for safeguards and laws that protect breastfeeding - a resilient practice that provides food, care, immune support and protection from the worst of emergency conditions.

Protection for breastfeeding should be integrated into the intergovernmental Committee on Emergency Prevention & Management. The WHO report notes that poor quality information or disinformation is a significant exacerbating factor during health emergencies. IBFAN and other monitoring shows how, in times of crisis, baby food businesses easily mislead and exploit public fears, with harmful donations and claiming their products build immunity.

We call on WHO to strengthen its own Conflict of Interest safeguards and encourage Member States to prevent commercial infiltration of health policy spaces and the undermining of WHO advice. National COVID-19 guidelines should use basic hygiene rules while supporting skin-to-skin contact, rooming-in and breastfeeding even for mothers who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. Many government newborn care and COVID-19 policies are now barriers to breastfeeding - among countries sampled in a 2020 study, 50% are not recommending breastfeeding, and none are fully aligned with WHO recommendations. This is a serious risk to child survival that must be addressed.

WHO must also help ensure that micronutrient and other interventions during emergencies are not commercially promoted and that they are used only in strictly controlled, appropriately designed programmes that protect breastfeeding and transition to nutritious family foods with psycho-social support for recovery. Interventions should be culturally appropriate and must not undermine sustainable food production, food security and biodiversity. Thank You