

PRESS RELEASE

World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 2007



Early Initiation of Breastfeeding Can Save more than ONE Million Babies

Immediate initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding for six months can save more than ONE million babies. This year's World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) calls upon policy makers, health workers, families and community members to ensure conducive conditions for mothers and babies to start breastfeeding during the first hour of birth.

An examination of 37 countries, covering some 60 per cent of the developing world population, by the Bellagio Child Survival Group, published in *Lancet* in 2003, has revealed an increase in the rates of exclusive breastfeeding from 34% to 41% in the first six months of children's lives. Some studies even suggest an additional **1.3 million children would be saved annually** if this rate were increased to 90%, while neonatal mortality would be reduced by 22% when children are breastfed within an hour of birth.

In a recent study published in *Pediatrics* in 2006, babies who started to breastfeed in the first hour of life in rural Ghana were more likely to survive the neonatal period than those who did not. Babies who did not start breastfeeding until after 24 hours from birth were 2.5 times more likely to die than babies who did.

"In a world where more than 10 million children die before their fifth birthday due to preventable causes, and where malnutrition is still rampant and associated with over half of all childhood deaths, there is simply no time to waste. Let's start with the first hour," said Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of World Health Organization.¹

Immediate skin-to-skin contact of the mother and baby is an important factor for successful initiation of breastfeeding as it restores the connection between mother and baby once the baby is out of the womb. This will keep the baby appropriately warm, induce maternal oxytocin release and ensures that baby receives colostrum during the first feeds. The late Mary Kroeger, in the book *Impact of Birthing Practices on Breastfeeding*, urged, "Advocate for the mother-baby continuum by taking the stand that breastfeeding cannot be the *physiologic norm* without including *physiologic childbirth* and immediate and uninterrupted mother-baby contact."

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/ UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Action Food Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). For more information, please contact: World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) • P.O.Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia • Tel: 60-4-6584816 • Fax: 60-4-6572655 • Email: waba@streamyx.com • Website: www.waba.org.my

WBW 2007 will once again be celebrated in over 120 countries worldwide on 1-7 August with the theme *Breastfeeding: The 1st Hour - Early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding for six months can save more than ONE million babies!* This theme emphasises that ONE simple action of allowing the baby to initiate breastfeeding in the first hour of life could potentially save ONE million babies.

ONE action that individuals and country groups could do during WBW is to join the first ever attempt to create the ***Guinness World Record on Synchronised Breastfeeding in Multiple Sites***. Children for Breastfeeding, in partnership with the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), is recruiting committed groups to be part of this solidarity to show that ONE can make a global difference by participating in creating this inaugural world record.

The effort to gain a new world record will bring attention from policy makers to the communities to recognize the importance of breastfeeding initiation during the first hour. "The challenge we face is to find creative and convincing ways at the community level to encourage breastfeeding and to provide national authorities with solid evidence of the advantages of promoting breastfeeding at the national level," said Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF.²

Join the World Breastfeeding Week in responding to this challenge!

For further information, and to participate in the *Guinness World Record on Synchronised Breastfeeding in Multiple Sites*, contact:

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¹ World Health Organization (WHO) WBW 2007 Statement, http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/pdf/who_support_letter.pdf

² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) WBW 2007 Statement, http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/pdf/unicef_support_letter.pdf



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