



Breastmilk remains the safest and most economical option for children

Joint statement by the Myanmar Nutrition Cluster

YANGON, 24 March 2022 – The Nutrition cluster in Myanmar calls for increased protection, promotion, and support for breastfeeding in context of the current emergency situation in Myanmar and caution against unnecessary and harmful donations and use of breast-milk substitutes. We urge all stakeholders in Myanmar to step up the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding.

While formula milk products are readily available in Myanmar, mothers and care takers need to know the risks of using BMS products. During emergency situations such disease and death rates among under-five children are usually higher than for any other age group, the younger the infant the higher the risk. Use of formula milk and other breastmilk substitutes could increase the risk of malnutrition, illness and death Breastmilk remains the safest and most economical option especially in settings of sub-optimal access to safe water, sanitation facilities, electricity, and fuel, etc. Therefore, we encourage mothers and caretakers to avoid feeding children infant formula unless prescribed by medical personnel in exceptional circumstances.

During the first six months of life, a baby who is not breastfed is 14 times more likely to die than an exclusively breastfed baby. They are also more prone to diarrhoea, pneumonia, malnutrition, and other childhood illnesses.

Breastmilk is safe and clean and contains all nutrients that provide immunity against many common childhood illnesses. In line with WHO and UNICEF recommendations, mothers should be encouraged to exclusively breastfeed within the first hour of birth and continue breastfeeding exclusively for six months without adding water or any other foods. Additional nutrient-rich foods should be introduced only after 6 months along with continued breastfeeding up to 23 months and beyond.

Even when a mother or a baby is sick, including due to COVID-19 infection, it is usually best that the mother breastfeeds. If the baby is sick, increased breastfeeding helps the baby fight sickness, gain weight and recover more quickly. If the mother is sick, even with a COVID-19 infection, breastfeeding is usually the best option along with the necessary precautions.

In addition to better health outcomes, breastfeeding promotes bonding between a mother and improves an infant's cognitive development. Later in life, an infant who is breastfed has a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, asthma, and dental decay.

Therefore, we urge all mothers, caretakers, and communities to prioritize and promote exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 month and safe, appropriate complementary feeding just after 6 months with continued breastfeeding especially in emergencies.

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