

International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes

1.0 History

- The 34th World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted the International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes in 1981.
- The purpose of the code is to protect and promote breastfeeding by ensuring proper use of breast milk substitutes only when necessary. The code requires dissemination of adequate information as well as appropriate marketing and distribution.
- More than 160 countries and territories agreed to take steps to implement the code.
- Currently there is no legislative support or pending legislative actions for enacting tenets of the code in the United States.

2.0 Code Summary

The International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary: International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes

- No advertising of breast milk substitutes directly to the public.
- No free samples to mothers.
- No promotion of products in health care facilities.
- No company-sponsored "mothercraft" nurses to advise mothers. (Mothercraft nurses provide care to newborn infants as well as advice and training on infant care to parents.)
- No gifts or personal samples to health workers.
- No words or pictures idealizing artificial feeding, including pictures of infants on the products.
- Information to health workers should be scientific and factual.
- All information on artificial feeding, including the labels, should explain benefits of breastfeeding and costs and hazards associated with artificial feeding.
- Unsuitable products, such as condensed milk, should not be promoted for babies.
- All products should be of a high quality and take into account the climatic and storage conditions of the country where they are used.

3.0 Implementation and Monitoring

- The code is a recommendation rather than a regulation; therefore, each individual government determines how the code will be monitored and enforced.
- Governments should take action to put into practice the principles and aims of the code as appropriate to each nation's social and legislative framework.
- In the United States the National Alliance for Breastfeeding Advocacy (NABA) monitors compliance and publishes a report on code violations.

4.0 Key Principles in Support of Implementation of the Code

The International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes includes key principles of justification and support for the recommendations (Table 2).

Table 2. Key Principles of Justification and Support for Code Recommendations

Key principles of justification and support for recommendations as stated in the International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes:

- Affirming the right of every child and every pregnant and lactating woman to be adequately nourished, as a means of attaining and maintaining health
- Recognizing that infant malnutrition is part of the wider problems of lack of education, poverty, and social injustice
- Recognizing that the health of infants and young children cannot be isolated from the health and nutrition of women, their socioeconomic status, and their roles as mothers
- Conscious that breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; that it forms a unique biological and emotional basis for the health of both mother and child; that the anti-infective properties of breast milk help to protect infants against disease; and that there is an important relationship between breastfeeding and child spacing
- Recognizing that the encouragement and protection of breastfeeding is an important

part of the health, nutrition, and other social measures required to promote healthy growth and development of infants and young children; and that breastfeeding is an important aspect of primary health care

- Recognizing further that inappropriate feeding practices lead to infant malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality in all countries, and that improper practices in the marketing of breast milk substitutes and related products can contribute to these major public health problems

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