



Breastfeeding ensures child health and survival1 August 2012 – On the occasion of World Breastfeeding Week and 10 years after the launch of the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, the world is looking back to gauge the success of efforts to support all women to optimally feed and care for their infants and young children, and also to plan what more can be done.

Breastfeeding is one of the most effective ways to ensure child health and survival. Together with complementary feeding, it can save about a million child lives every year. The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life as a way to improve child survival and health.

However, globally only 37% of infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed for the first six months.

World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated in the first week of August in more than 170 countries to encourage breastfeeding. It commemorates the Innocenti Declaration by WHO and UNICEF in August 1990 to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. This year is the 20th anniversary of the Week, launched by the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action. The theme of World Breastfeeding Week 2012 is “Understanding the past, planning for the future: Celebrating 10 years of WHO/UNICEF’s Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding”. The theme this

year focuses on the progress made on the implementation of breastfeeding policies since the 1970s, when the breastfeeding movement and the international debate led to the adoption of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (The Code) by the World Health Assembly in 1981. Today, the global scientific community acknowledges the vital role of breastfeeding for the survival, growth and development of the 136.7 million babies born worldwide each year.

The Global Strategy, adopted by WHO and UNICEF ten years ago, identified a clear need for optimal infant feeding practices in reducing malnutrition as well as poverty. It is based on a human rights approach and calls for the development of comprehensive national policies on infant and young child feeding. It provides guidance on how to protect, promote and support exclusive breastfeeding for first six months, and continued breastfeeding for two years or beyond together with adequate, appropriate and indigenous complementary feeding starting from the age of six months.

Experts at WHO say that to give your baby the best start in life, breastfeeding must be encouraged on demand, whenever the baby is hungry, and no artificial teats or pacifiers should be given to breastfeeding infants. Breastfeeding is the “gold standard” when it comes to infant feeding, the ideal source of nourishment and antibodies that protect them from common illnesses.

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