



IMPROVING BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES

Our focus is on promoting breastfeeding and extending the documented benefits of breastfeeding to children, mothers and the nation.

Breastfeeding in China

China has a low rate of breastfeeding with four out of every five children missing out on the full benefits of exclusive breastfeeding.

Mothers, especially from rural areas, receive inaccurate and insufficient information and advice from friends, relatives and health workers. They lack knowledge and support to make an informed decision to breastfeed. China's maternity leave policies are among the best in the East Asia and Pacific region, but enforcement and opportunities to breastfeed are lacking and many mothers do not receive their full entitlement which may negatively affect the exclusive breastfeeding rate for children under six months of age.

China is one of the largest global markets for breast milk substitutes valued at USD17.7 billion. There is currently no legal framework governing the marketing of breast milk substitutes as national legislation on the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* (the Code) was abolished in 2017. Violations of the Code continue to be observed in China and some mothers continue to receive free formula samples.

Our programme

UNICEF aims to improve health outcomes for children and mothers by increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates in China and advocates for the full implementation of the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*.

China's near universal hospital delivery rate provides an opportunity for mothers to receive information and support on breastfeeding. Our approach includes training health workers to provide breastfeeding knowledge and counselling, training peer counselors to provide support, throughout the first 1000 days, i.e., from prenatal health check to postnatal care.

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, a partnership between UNICEF, WHO and the National Health Commission, has certified health institutions that champion breastfeeding by providing information and support for mothers.

Our *10m² of Love* campaign raises public awareness of breastfeeding and is helping to create a more supportive environment for mothers to continue breastfeeding by providing a comfortable and private space at work and in public area.

Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, established in 1991 in China, certifies medical institutions that promote maternal and child health including providing breastfeeding promotion and support for mothers by health workers. By 2015, all 31 provinces in China had at least one baby-friendly hospital with over 7,000 re-certified as baby-friendly.

The internationally recognized services offered in certified baby-friendly hospitals are proven to result in a higher rate of breastfeeding and fewer caesarian section cases. 92 per cent of infants born in China's baby-friendly hospitals were exclusively breastfed during their hospital stay.

Breastfeeding counselling

UNICEF trains health workers and peer counsellors to ensure that they have a strong foundation of knowledge and are able to provide sensitive and effective care enabling mothers to make an informed decision about feeding, get breastfeeding off to a good start and overcome any challenges they may face. Workshops in 2017 were attended by the National People's Congress Vice Chairman and previous Vice Minister, Deputy Director General of the Maternal Child Health department of National Health Commission.

10m² of Love

UNICEF's *10m² of Love* campaign in China promotes breastfeeding as a social norm, whether at home, at work or in public places. Standards for breastfeeding rooms were adapted from the International Labour organization's guidelines.

UNICEF created a tracking website and a mobile phone application to enable breastfeeding mothers to easily find a nearby registered and certified *10m² of Love* breastfeeding room.

Volunteers and resources available through the website and the mobile phone application provide guidance on various aspects of breastfeeding, including preparation to breastfeed, early initiation of breastfeeding and how to overcome problems.

By end of 2017, more than 2,000 breastfeeding rooms were verified and certified as *10m² of Love*.

Making the case

UNICEF actively promotes breastfeeding especially through our involvement in the annual World Breastfeeding Week. In 2016, the Lancet Breastfeeding Series and Early Childhood Development Series were launched in Beijing supporting evidence-informed breastfeeding promotion and multi-sectoral interventions focused on early childhood development. With the international NGO Alive and Thrive, UNICEF is conducting studies into the economic disadvantages of non-breastfeeding.

UNICEF advocates for China's inclusion of breastfeeding into the Noncommunicable Disease Prevention and Control Strategy using evidence from birth cohort studies.

"If breastfeeding did not already exist, someone who invented it today would deserve a dual Nobel Prize in medicine and economics."

Keith Hanson,
Vice President for Human Development,
World Bank Group

Time for action on *the code*

UNICEF's report '*China's Mapping of the Implementation of the International Code on the Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*' reviews the Code's implementation and existing monitoring mechanisms and processes in China. The report analyses the gaps and barriers which hinder monitoring activities and the roles and responsibilities of relevant government sectors, non-governmental organizations and professional associations in monitoring and supporting the implementation of *the Code*. UNICEF has assisted in developing a set of guidelines on infant and young child feeding in emergencies, which highlight pre-conditions for using breastmilk substitutes during emergencies.

Breastfeeding benefits children: Lowers infectious morbidity and mortality, reduces dental malocclusions, leads to higher intelligence and increased bonding, and reduce the risk of obesity and diabetes.

Breastfeeding benefits mothers: Can prevent breast cancer, improve birth spacing and might reduce risk of diabetes, being overweight and ovarian cancer.

Breastfeeding benefits the nation: Can boost economic development of a nation through enhanced cognitive capital and alleviate burden and cost of diseases originating in childhood.



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