



STRONGER WITH BREASTMILK ONLY

no water until 6 months
for a healthier baby



Give Breastmilk Only: Guidance for Policy and Programme Managers

The *Stronger With Breastmilk Only* campaign promotes giving babies breastmilk only, on demand (day and night), and stopping the practice of giving water (and other liquids and foods), from the moment of birth through the first six months of life. It aims for all countries in West and Central Africa to achieve the global exclusive breastfeeding target of 50 per cent by 2025.

Stronger With Breastmilk Only echoes the call to action of the Global Breastfeeding Collective, a partnership of more than 20 international organizations, with the goal of increasing investment and policy change to support breastfeeding worldwide. This goal requires advocacy at the global, national and sub-national levels in order to meet the global breastfeeding target.

INTRODUCTION

Healthy newborns enter the world well hydrated and remain so if they are breastfed exclusively, meaning they receive breastmilk only, on demand (day and night) – no water, other liquids or foods, from the moment of birth and for the first six months of life, even in the hottest and driest climates. Yet, giving infants water during the first six months of life is common in many parts of the world, including in West and Central Africa. This practice is deeply rooted in social norms and family traditions, but has an impact to infant nutrition, health and survival, and limits the prosperity of communities and nations. Policies and programmes that protect, promote and support exclusive breastfeeding, with strategies that address the social, cultural and behavioural drivers are urgently needed to improve exclusive breastfeeding rates across the region.

THE PROBLEM

GIVING WATER, OTHER LIQUIDS AND FOODS IN THE FIRST 6 MONTHS OF LIFE HAS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES, BUT THE PRACTICE CONTINUES

WHO and UNICEF recommend based on scientific evidence that all infants receive only breastmilk from the moment of birth and for the first six

months of life. No water, herbal preparations, animal milk, infant formula or other liquids and foods should be given.

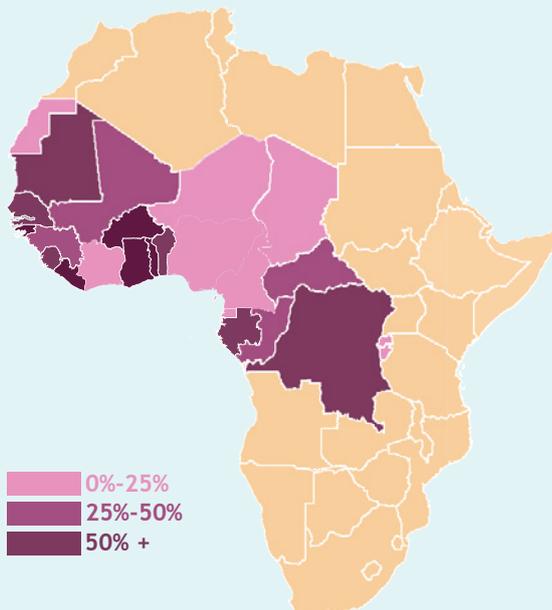
Giving water puts infants younger than six months at risk of malnutrition because it reduces intake of breastmilk, depriving infants of essential nutrients and calories. An infant's stomach is very small. It fills quickly and even a little water reduces the baby's appetite for nutrient-rich breastmilk. Reduced breastfeeding also decreases the mother's breastmilk supply.

Giving water puts infants younger than six months at risk of illnesses. Contaminated water and feeding instruments can expose infants to diarrhoea and respiratory infection-causing germs. This can be life-threatening.

Despite progress, only three out of 10 infants in West and Central Africa receive breastmilk only in the first six months of life. Seven out of every 10 infants are given other liquids and foods. In most cases, water is given. Families have many reasons for giving water. The practice may be based on

social norms, traditional beliefs and the desire to ensure the infant's well-being. It may also be encouraged by companies that market bottled water.

Exclusive Breastfeeding Rates WCARO



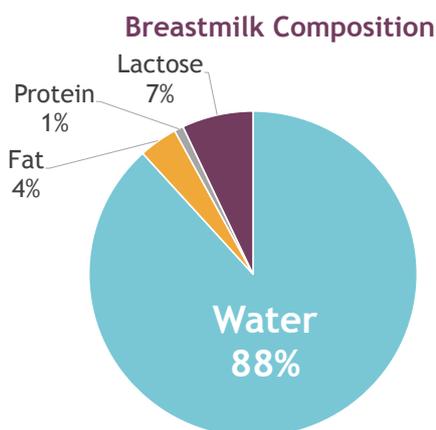
Source: UNICEF, IYCF Global Databases, 2019.

THE SOLUTION

IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES THAT PROTECT, PROMOTE AND SUPPORT EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING

Breastmilk is the most uniquely tailored, safest, healthiest and best source of food and water for infants from the moment of birth and for the first six months of life, no matter where they live.

Breastmilk is 88 per cent water. When provided on demand (day and night), breastmilk meets the water requirements for infants aged under six months with a considerable margin of safety, even in hot and dry climates.



Source: Lawrence R. *Breastfeeding: A Guide for Medical Profession*, 1994.

A mother's supply adapts to her baby's needs. The more a baby breastfeeds, the more breastmilk there is, which means more water and nutrients for the baby. In hot and dry climates, a mother should breastfeed often. The mother should also drink enough water to keep herself hydrated.

Devoting attention to early childhood nutrition is an investment in human capital that maximizes a nation's 'grey matter infrastructure' and yields some of the highest returns in the development field.

To promote giving babies breastmilk only, no water:

Policy makers can:

- ✓ Invest in the design and implementation of evidence-informed activities that respond to social and behavioural determinants and build on existing programmes.
- ✓ Enact and fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions; monitor and enforce compliance of businesses marketing bottled water.
- ✓ Establish and implement family friendly policies, such as paid leave, access to quality childcare, time and space for breastfeeding in the workplace.

Programme managers can:

- ✓ Integrate *Stronger With Breastmilk Only* into existing nutrition-related programmes.
- ✓ Strengthen counselling on benefits of giving babies breastmilk only and risks of giving water, and support skills-and confidence-building for breastfeeding.
- ✓ Invest in awareness-raising activities and engage communities to address social norms around giving babies water to accelerate social change in favour of *Stronger With Breastmilk Only*.
- ✓ Enlist support of grandmothers, husbands and social influencers to find culturally appropriate solutions to breastfeeding barriers.
- ✓ Educate manufacturers and distributors of bottled water about the impact of marketing their products for infants. Support their compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and other relevant World Health Assembly resolutions and national legislation.

ACT NOW!

Early childhood nutrition is a crucial foundation for the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children and productivity later in life.

UNICEF estimates that, if water were no longer part of infants' diets in West and Central Africa, almost all countries in the region would achieve the World Health Assembly target for exclusive breastfeeding of 50 per cent by 2025.

Meeting the global exclusive breastfeeding target of 50 per cent by 2025 could save the lives of 520,000 children and generate billions of dollars in economic gains as a result of increased productivity and reduced costs of illness and health care.

Breastmilk is the only source of water and food infants need from the moment of birth and for the first six months of life.

Investing resources in exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life is a smart, cost-effective investment with lifelong benefits for children, mothers, families, communities and nations.



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TOOLS AND RESOURCES

▶ The Global Breastfeeding Collective, 'The Breastfeeding Advocacy Toolkit':

This toolkit is intended to ensure stakeholders are able to easily access and use advocacy tools aimed at improving policies and financing for the protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding.

▶ UNICEF, WHO, 'Global Nutrition Targets 2025: Breastfeeding Policy Brief':

This brief summarizes the rationale for increased attention to, and investment in improving exclusive breastfeeding in member states. It outlines a set of cost-effective interventions and policies that can help member states and their partners in improving feeding practices for infants under six months.

▶ UNICEF, WHO, 'Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding':

The strategy is the guiding framework through which WHO prioritizes research and development work in the area of infant and young child feeding and provides technical support to countries to facilitate implementation.

▶ The LINKAGES Project, 'Exclusive Breastfeeding: The Only Water Source Young Infants Need':

This frequently asked questions sheet presents essential scientific information in simple terms to tackle the inadequate practice of giving water to infants under six months.

The United Nations University, 'Learning from the Design and Implementation of Large-scale Programs to Improve Infant and Young Child Feeding':

This paper summarizes major lessons from Alive & Thrive's work to improve infant and young child feeding in three diverse settings, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Vietnam, including drivers of successful design and implementation of strategies.



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Protect, promote and support giving babies breastmilk only, no water for the first six months of life in West And Central Africa

Consult the Stronger With Breastmilk Only Reference List for more information

