Implementing the Bangladesh Breast-milk Substitutes Act

The Breast-milk Substitutes, Infant Foods, Commercially Manufactured Complementary Foods and the Accessories Thereof (Regulation of Marketing) Act, 2013¹

The Bangladesh Breast-milk Substitutes (BMS) Act was developed to ensure that mothers and families receive accurate and unbiased information about the healthiest way to feed their infants and young children, free of commercial influence.

WHAT DOES THE BMS ACT PROHIBIT?

The BMS Act prohibits the following:

• Samples of BMS and related accessories to infants, mothers, childcare providers, or any health care providers
• Circulation or distribution of misleading information about child health and development, the nutritional value of BMS, or the safety of BMS and implying that BMS are superior to breast-milk
• Any gift, discount coupon, price reduction, or any other material free of cost, even at the time of disaster management
• Activities, programs, or events for the promotion of BMS
• Sponsorships, gifts, funding of fellowships, trainings, and conferences, and financial benefits to health care providers and associations
• Direct contact with pregnant women, lactating women, or caregivers
• Advertising and promotion of BMS, infant foods, bottles, and teats
• Unauthorized labelling of BMS products, infant foods, bottles, and teats
• Import, production, marketing, sales, or distribution of BMS, infant foods, bottles, and teats without registration

BREASTFEEDING SAVES LIVES AND IMPROVES THE HEALTH OF INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND NATIONS!

Why breastfeeding is so important

✓ 20% of newborn deaths could be prevented by initiating breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth²

✓ 820,000 children under 5 could be saved by exclusive breastfeeding each year³

✓ Infants exclusively breastfed for 6 months are 11X less likely to die from diarrhoea³

✓ 15X less likely to die from pneumonia⁴

Yet, in Bangladesh...

Thousands of children’s lives are put at risk annually due to poor breastfeeding practices.

National data shows that only

68% of mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth⁶

65% of children are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life⁶
VIOLATIONS OF THE BMS ACT IN HEALTH SERVICES

A 2019 study, under the leadership of Institute of Public Health Nutrition, conducted by the Alive & Thrive initiative in partnership with icddr,b assessing violations of the BMS Act in health facilities in Dhaka (n=43) among service providers (n=172) and mothers of children below age 2 who received services (n=330) revealed partnership with icddr,b.

- 23% of mothers received advice about giving BMS products from doctors during antenatal care (ANC) or delivery.
- 13% of mothers received advice about giving BMS products from pediatricians.
- 15% of mothers received advice about giving any other foods or drinks when the child was less than 6 months of age from pediatricians.
- 48% of providers reported that BMS companies contacted staff at the facility:
  - 9 of every 10 contacts were for promoting specific BMS products to mothers.
  - 1 of every 4 contacts were to give gifts for personal or hospital use like toys, bags, nappies/diapers, calendars, notebooks, or growth charts.
- 40% of providers, who were contacted by BMS companies, were invited or received sponsorship to attend events such as seminars, conferences, workshops, or training outside the health facility.
- 56% of health facilities had BMS promotional materials that violated the BMS Act.
- 48 unique promotional materials were found primarily promoting BMS products.

WHAT CAN HEALTH ADMINISTRATORS AND HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS DO?

**Health Administrators**

1. Ensure all staffs in your facility are oriented on BMS Act 2013 regularly.
2. Have a written breastfeeding policy in your facility and communicate consistently about this policy with all staff on a regular basis.
3. Implement 10 Steps of Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative in your facility to create an environment that is mother and baby friendly and have printed documents about the initiative on display.
4. DO NOT accept or distribute samples of BMS, feeding bottles, or infant foods in your facility.
5. DO NOT accept equipment, sponsorships, gifts, fellowships, or financial support for attending trainings, workshops, conferences or other events from BMS companies or distributors.
6. DO NOT advertise or promote BMS, feeding bottles, or infant foods in your facility.
7. DO NOT allow companies marketing BMS products to use your health facilities for commercial events, contests, or campaigns.

**Health Service Providers**

1. Educate mothers and their family members about the benefits of breastfeeding and demonstrate the techniques of breastfeeding.
2. Inform mothers and their family members that breastfeeding is the safest, healthiest, and most nourishing food for an infant.
3. Support early initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour after birth and counsel to support exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding from six to 23 months and beyond.
4. Counsel mothers and their family members on the hazards of BMS.
5. Provide appropriate guidance on the use of BMS for infants only based on the World Health Organization’s “acceptable medical reasons for use of BMS.”
6. DO NOT accept or distribute samples of breast-milk substitutes, feeding bottles, or infant foods.
7. DO NOT accept sponsorships, gifts, fellowships, or financial support for conferences/workshops from BMS companies.

WHERE CAN YOU REPORT VIOLATIONS?


Phone #: 9842367/9887383, Cell #: 01816426998/01710279193, Fax #: 9898671

Email: iphn@id.dghs.gov.bd/iphn.gov@gmail.com

**WARNING!**

It is a punishable offence if a child dies or becomes ill from using any BMS product or related accessories. Under the BMS Act the offender would be sentenced for 10 years imprisonment and incur a financial penalty of 5 lac taka.

REFERENCES