

## WHAT IS THE CODE?

The World Health Assembly (WHA) adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (Code) in 1981 to protect infants and young children from inappropriate marketing of breastmilk substitutes, feeding bottles, and teats.

It was meant to encourage breastfeeding and ensure young children received adequate complementary feeding. Since the Code, the WHA has adopted 19 relevant resolutions. The 2016 WHA resolution welcomed the *Guidance on Ending the Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children* (Guidance). Adherence to the Code and relevant WHA resolutions is key to achieving optimal infant and young child feeding practices around the world.

## WHAT PRODUCTS ARE COVERED BY THE CODE?

The Code applies to the marketing of all products that function as breastmilk substitutes, which include any milk marketed for feeding infants and young children up to three years of age (including follow-up formula and growing-up milks), any other product marketed for feeding infants up to 6 months, as well as feeding bottles and teats. The 2016 Guidance also covers all commercially produced foods that are marketed for infants and children six months to three years of age.

## A CALL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Health workers, health care facilities, policymakers, and organizations supporting nutrition interventions have an important role to play. The first of the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding* asks that all health facilities comply fully with the Code and relevant World Health Assembly resolutions. This guide provides the highlights of the Code and relevant resolutions that we must work together to uphold.



## STRONGER WITH BREASTMILK ONLY

no water until 6 months  
for a healthier baby

Exclusive breastfeeding saves lives. Learn more about its importance and access a variety of resources at [www.breastmilkonly.com](http://www.breastmilkonly.com), the website of the Stronger With Breastmilk Only initiative. Unicef, the World Health Organization and Alive & Thrive launched the initiative in 2019.

# THE INTERNATIONAL CODE

of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes



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[ALIVEANDTHRIVE.ORG](http://ALIVEANDTHRIVE.ORG)

A **QUICK GUIDE** SUMMARIZING THE CODE AND RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS OF THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY THAT HELP PROTECT BREASTFEEDING AROUND THE GLOBE

# SUMMARY OF THE CODE AND RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS

## COMPANIES MUST NOT...

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TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- ✗ No advertising or other promotion of **breastmilk substitutes, feeding bottles, and teats**
- ✗ No product samples, gifts or direct contact with mothers
- ✗ Product labels should not discourage breastfeeding
- ✗ Product labels should not make nutrition or health claims
- ✗ No pictures of infants and no words or pictures idealizing artificial feeding on infant formula labels
- ✗ No inappropriate messages or labeling promoting **other foods for infants and young children:**
  - No images, text, or other representations that are likely to undermine or discourage breastfeeding
  - No suggested use for infants under 6 months
  - No promotion of bottle feeding
  - No endorsements by a professional body
  - No labeling, packaging or materials that resemble a company's breastmilk substitutes

- ✓ Ensure that their conduct at every level conforms to the Code and WHA resolutions

### Infant formula labels:

- ✓ Clearly state the superiority of breastfeeding and the need for the advice of a health worker
- ✓ Include preparation instructions and warnings about health hazards, including the risk of intrinsic contamination of powdered infant formula with microorganisms

### Foods for infants and young children other than breastmilk substitutes:

- ✓ Promote optimal feeding in all marketing messages and labels
- ✓ Include statements about the importance of:
  - Not introducing complementary feeding before 6 months of age
  - Continued breastfeeding for 2 years or more
- ✓ State the appropriate age for introducing the product

IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

- ✗ No promotion of **breastmilk substitutes**
- ✗ No distribution of materials or display of products or posters or materials concerning those products
- ✗ No distribution of free or low-cost supplies of **breastmilk substitutes** to any part of the health care system
- ✗ No free products, samples or reduced-price **foods for infants or young children** except as supplies distributed through officially sanctioned health programs
- ✗ No education on infant and young child feeding to parents or caregivers
- ✗ No gifts or financial support to health workers
- ✗ No sponsorship of meetings of health professionals or of scientific meetings

- ✓ Limit product information for health professionals to scientific and factual matters; such information should include the benefits and superiority of breastfeeding, health hazards associated with bottle-feeding, and costs of using infant formula in any materials or information provided



PRODUCT QUALITY

- ✗ No promotion of unsuitable products, such as sweetened condensed milk, for infants

- ✓ Ensure all products are of a high quality, meeting the Codex Alimentarius standards
- ✓ Foods for infants and young children should meet all relevant national, regional and global standards for composition, safety, quality and nutrient levels and should be in line with national dietary guidelines

## THE CRITICAL ROLE OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS AND HEALTH FACILITIES

Health workers have a responsibility to encourage and protect breastfeeding and must not accept or distribute samples of breastmilk substitutes.

If infant formula is necessary for a baby, demonstrate proper use and preparation only to mothers or family members who need to use it and clearly explain the hazards of improper use.

Health workers, health systems, professional associations, and nongovernmental organizations must not allow companies that market foods for infants and young children to:

- ✗ Use a health care facility to promote breastmilk substitutes, feeding bottles or teats.
- ✗ Donate equipment or services
- ✗ Provide free or low-cost donations or samples of breastmilk substitutes
- ✗ Provide other foods for infants or young children other than those distributed through officially sanctioned health programs, and never display company brands.
- ✗ Directly or indirectly provide education to parents and other caregivers.
- ✗ Use a health facility for commercial events, contests, or campaigns.
- ✗ Give gifts or coupons to parents, caregivers and families.
- ✗ Provide gifts or incentives to health care staff.

**Information and education materials** about infant feeding must explain the benefits and superiority of breastfeeding, health hazards associated with bottle-feeding, and costs of using infant formula.