

PROMOTING AND PROTECTING BREASTFEEDING IN INDIA

The Role of Health Providers and Policymakers in Supporting the IMS Act

Breastfeeding: The evidence is clear

Worldwide, breastfeeding is one of the most effective practices to save lives and improve health for individuals, families, and nations. Initiating breastfeeding within one hour of birth can prevent about 20 percent of new-born deaths by serving as the baby's first immunization against infection and disease.¹ Infants exclusively breastfed for six months are 11 times less likely to die from diarrhea and 15 times less likely to die from pneumonia—the two leading causes of childhood death.^{1,2} The Lancet Series on Breastfeeding (2016) concludes that breastmilk makes the world healthier, smarter and more equal place³.

Despite the established benefits of breastfeeding, each year thousands of children's lives are put at risk from poor breastfeeding practices². National data⁴ shows that:



Only **42 percent** of mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth



One in two children are exclusively breastfed for the first six months

India's Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act

In 1992, India adopted (and amended in 2003) the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act (IMS Act) which regulates the production, supply, and distribution of infant milk substitutes, infant foods, and feeding bottles with the aim to protect and promote breastfeeding⁵. Restrictions include:



- Advertising and promotion of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, or infant foods
- Unauthorized labelling of products, including complementary foods, such as the use of images of mothers and children or words that imply superiority to breastmilk
- Supply and distribution of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, or infant foods
- Educational materials, including advertisements, that promote infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, and infant foods
- Sponsorships, gifts, fellowships, and financial benefits to health care providers and their associations



Violations of the IMS Act are common across India!

Health providers and facilities play an essential role in promoting and protecting optimal breastfeeding: **REMEMBER and ACT**

Health providers and facilities are not only responsible for compliance to the IMS Act but also for reporting any violation of the IMS Act to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Ministry of Women and Child Development.

- ☑ Promote breastfeeding as the safest, healthiest, and most nourishing methods of feeding to all mother and families.
- ☑ Encourage and support mothers to place babies skin to skin and start breastfeeding within the first hour after birth.
- ☑ Provide skilled support and counselling to help mothers sustain breastfeeding.
- ☑ Inform mothers and their family members the hazards of improper use of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, and infant foods.
- ☑ In rare cases when a mother faces difficulty in breastfeeding, advise use of expressed milk or seeking support from lactation management expert.

- ☒ Do not advertise or promote infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, or infant foods.
- ☒ Do not give an impression or create a belief that feeding infant milk substitutes and infant foods are equivalent to, or better than, a mother's breastmilk.
- ☒ Do not demonstrate how to use formula for children under two years of age.
- ☒ Do not accept or distribute samples of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, or infant foods.
- ☒ Do not allow companies selling or producing food products for children under two years of age to display products or materials in your health facility.
- ☒ Do not accept money, gifts or funding for seminars, meetings, conferences, educational courses, contests, fellowships, research work, or sponsorships from manufacturers, suppliers, or distributors with the intent of promoting infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, or infant foods.

Support of policymakers and government leaders is critical for effective implementation of the IMS Act

The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), and Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India, are responsible for supervising and monitoring the implementation of the IMS Act, ensuring that breastmilk substitute companies adhere to laws and regulations.

- ✓ Organise mass awareness campaigns periodically to promote IMS Act and its implications.
- ✓ Appoint district and state level officers to monitor, investigate, and prosecute violations against the IMS Act and issue directives.
- ✓ Continually monitor and enforce the IMS Act, including in advertising, commercial and retail settings, and at health facilities.
- ✓ Implement and enforce strict penalties for breastmilk substitute companies that do not comply with the IMS Act.
- ✓ Ensure that all infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, and infant foods sold or distributed meet the standards outlined in the IMS Act, the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act of 1954, and the Bureau of Indian Standards.
- ✓ Consistently educate retailers and health workers on the penalties for not adhering to the IMS Act.
- ✓ Establish lactation management centres to ensure that in cases where mothers face difficulties in breastfeeding, they have access to expert support.

India is a signatory to the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms the inalienable human rights of all children. Policymakers are critical to maintaining that commitment, by ensuring mothers and families have the most accurate information on how to give their children the healthiest possible start in life.

When policymakers and health providers support the IMS Act, they **PROMOTE, SUPPORT & PROTECT** breastfeeding: the healthiest possible start in life for all children.

Citations

1. Begum, K., & Dewey, K., Alive & Thrive Insight, "Impact of early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding on newborn deaths," 2010.
2. Barros, A., et al., The Lancet, Vol. 379, "Countdown to 2015: a retrospective review of survey data from 54 countries: equity in maternal, newborn, and child health interventions," 2012.
3. The Lancet Breastfeeding Series, 2016.
4. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India Fact Sheet.
5. The Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992 as Amended in 2003 (IMS Act).

Violations of the IMS Act in health facilities should be referred to the district Civil Surgeon or District Magistrate. Violations by retailers should be referred to the local Drug Inspector.