



STRONGER WITH BREASTMILK ONLY

no water until 6 months
for a healthier baby



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A Call to Protect, Promote and Support Exclusive Breastfeeding in West and Central Africa

Breastfeeding gives children the healthiest start in life. Scientific evidence recommends giving babies breastmilk only, on demand (day and night); no water, other liquids or foods should be given from the moment of birth and for the first six months of life. Breastmilk is uniquely tailored to provide all the water and food babies need to grow healthy, smart and strong.

Breastmilk has many benefits. It serves as their first vaccine and protects babies from disease. It stimulates brain development and improves IQ. It also protects women's health by helping recovery after childbirth, birth spacing by delaying menstruation and reducing the long-term risk of breast and ovarian cancers. When mothers breastfeed, everyone benefits. Breastfeeding leads to lower health care costs, healthier families, a smarter workforce and more prosperous communities and nations.

Yet only three out of 10 babies aged under six months in West and Central Africa are *exclusively* breastfed, meaning they are given breastmilk only. Seven out of every 10 breastfed babies receive other liquids and foods in their first six months of life. In most cases, water is given.

Giving babies water, other liquids and foods during these critical first six months of life can have a negative impact, exposing them to illness and

malnutrition and threatening their lives. Water can introduce germs that cause diarrhoea and respiratory infections. Giving water displaces breastmilk, depriving babies of essential nutrients and calories. Since milk supply is dependent on time spent suckling the breast, giving water decreases the amount of milk produced. This initiates a perilous cycle that challenges the growth, health and survival of infants.

In response, 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 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 target of at least 50 per cent of infants under six months of age being exclusively breastfed by 2025.

The *Stronger With Breastmilk Only* campaign echoes the call of the Global Breastfeeding Collective, a global partnership to increase political commitment, investment and policy change to support breastfeeding - one of the smartest investments a country can make.

Stronger With Breastmilk Only Calls for Action at All Levels.

GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND POLICY MAKERS ARE CALLED TO:

- ✓ **Increase funding** to support implementation, monitoring and enforcement of national policies and plans that support exclusive breastfeeding.
- ✓ **Adopt, monitor and enforce legislation** that regulates the marketing and promotion of breastmilk substitutes for infants, such as the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. This includes regulating the marketing of bottled water.
- ✓ **Engage with the business sector and social insurance schemes** to enact family-friendly policies. This should include policies that protect working women's right to breastfeed such as the International Labour Organization's maternity protection guidelines.

BUSINESSES ARE CALLED TO:

- ✓ **Comply with laws and regulations that protect breastfeeding** and the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes for infants.
- ✓ **Implement family-friendly policies** to support breastfeeding mothers by providing maternity leave and breastfeeding space, time and support in the workplace.

PROGRAMME MANAGERS ARE CALLED TO:

- ✓ **Update facility- and community-based health worker breastfeeding training curricula** to strengthen counselling skills and improve understanding of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and risks of giving water.
- ✓ **Design and implement evidence-driven social and behavioural change strategies** that address the various factors that influence infant feeding to promote sustainable transformations in support of giving breastmilk only to infants under six months.
- ✓ **Engage mothers, grandmothers, other family members and community networks** in crafting and implementing realistic solutions that address barriers to giving babies breastmilk only.

HEALTH WORKERS ARE CALLED TO:

- ✓ **Comply with laws and regulations that protect and promote breastfeeding**, including the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes for infants and the (revised) Ten Steps for Successful Breastfeeding.





- ✓ **Develop health workers' knowledge about the importance of giving breastmilk only** and the risks of giving water (and other liquids and foods) at the moment of birth and for the first six months of life.
- ✓ **Develop health workers' ability to support practical skills in positioning and good attachment at the breast**, breastmilk expression, safe storage and handling, and feeding expressed breastmilk.
- ✓ **Improve their counselling skills**, especially listening, problem-solving and confidence-building with breastfeeding women.
- ✓ **Ensure that health workers also counsel family members** to support giving breastmilk only for the first six months.

FAMILIES ARE CALLED TO:

- ✓ **Not give water** (other liquids or foods) to babies in their first six months of life.
- ✓ **Help mothers** with household chores and the care of older siblings.
- ✓ **Ensure breastfeeding mothers eat enough nutritious meals** and drink water.
- ✓ **Give emotional support** to breastfeeding mothers.
- ✓ **Participate in family conversations** and community dialogues about the *Stronger With Breastmilk Only* campaign messages.

COMMUNITIES ARE CALLED TO:

- ✓ **Participate in community dialogues and *Stronger With Breastmilk Only* campaign activities**
- ✓ **Use their influence to mobilize professional and social networks** to spread the word that babies need breastmilk only, on demand (day and night); no water, other liquids or foods for the first six months of life.

EXPECTED RESULTS OF TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE BREASTFEEDING RATES

- ➔ Saving young lives! Globally, hundreds of thousands of children under age five could be saved every year.
- ➔ Prevent breast cancer.
- ➔ Save hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs.
- ➔ Generate vast savings in national economies by preventing child mortality and cognitive losses.

PARTNERS IN THE GLOBAL BREASTFEEDING COLLECTIVE

1,000 Days, Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, Action Against Hunger, Alive & Thrive, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CARE, Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute, Center for Women's Health and Wellness, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Concern Worldwide, Helen Keller International, International Baby Food Action Network, International Lactation Consultant Association, La Leche League International, New Partnership for Africa's Development, Nutrition International, PATH, Save the Children, United Nations Children's Fund, United States Agency for International Development, World Health Organization, World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, World Bank and World Vision International.



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Protecting, promoting and supporting giving babies
breastmilk only, no water for the first six months of life in
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Consult the Stronger With Breastmilk Only Reference List for more information

