

BREASTMILK FOR ALL BABIES

TU DU HOSPITAL HUMAN MILK BANK

Breastfeeding gives children the best start in life

Breastfeeding is vital for child survival, growth, and cognitive development, and contributes to the socioeconomic development of families, communities, and nations. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF recommend that mothers breastfeed their babies within the first hour of life and exclusively for the first six months, and continue to breastfeed along with appropriate complementary feeding up to two years of age and beyond. For mothers to successfully breastfeed their babies and meet these recommendations, they need a supportive health care environment.

Since 2014, Irish Aid has been supporting A&T's portfolio in Southeast Asia, initially focused on creating an enabling environment for breastfeeding through the development and implementation of policies and laws to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding – including but not limited to – national legislations on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes and maternity protection. Beginning in 2017, and in response to current trends in the region, this focus has broadened to include healthcare provider behavior change at the time of birth, and development of health facilities that are breastfeeding-friendly.

A second human milk bank in Viet Nam

For infants unable to receive breastmilk from their mothers, human milk banks (HMBs) serve a vital role. Since 2017, with assistance from A&T, Tu Du Hospital has been working to establish the country's second HMB. With an annual birth rate of approximately 70,000, Tu Du Hospital is one of the largest maternity hospitals in Viet Nam. More babies were born in Tu Du Hospital in 2017 than in the whole of Ireland.¹ A destination for high-risk and complicated births, approximately 25 percent of all babies at Tu Du Hospital require special care in the neonatal pediatrics department. Most of these babies are born premature, with a low birth weight, ill, and/or otherwise vulnerable. This new HMB will help to ensure that all newborns at the hospital, including the most vulnerable, have access to human milk.

In July 2018, Tu Du Hospital received formal approval from the Department of Health of Ho Chi Minh City to establish the HMB. In addition to providing technical assistance for

HUMAN MILK BANKING IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF A BREASTFEEDING-FRIENDLY HEALTH SYSTEM, GIVING PRE-TERM, LOW BIRTHWEIGHT, AND OTHER VULNERABLE INFANTS ACCESS TO THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF BREASTMILK WHEN THEY NEED IT THE MOST.

the set up and operation of the HMB, A&T equipped the facility with two pasteurizers. Standard operating procedures, guidelines, and a communications plan and materials are in place. Protocols for quality control and mother-milk donor and volunteer recruitment are in development, with the new HMB expected to open in April 2019.

From specialized center for early newborn care to Center for Breastfeeding Excellence

Tu Du Hospital has been recognized as one of three specialized training centers for early essential newborn care (EENC) in Viet Nam by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the WHO. With funding from Irish Aid, A&T is working with the Viet Nam MoH and local partners to support Tu Du Hospital in becoming a Center of Breastfeeding Excellence (CBFE), a designation signifying the facility's commitment to creating an environment that supports breastfeeding. The CBFEs promote skin-to-skin contact and other EENC practices, ensuring that mothers can successfully initiate breastfeeding early, and enabling mothers to exclusively breastfeed. Evidence shows that when mothers and babies have a successful start to breastfeeding, they are more likely to exclusively breastfeed, and to continue breastfeeding longer.

Through the establishment of HMBs at Tu Du Hospital and other facilities in Viet Nam, A&T aims to support the MoH in developing national guidelines for human milk banking. This will enable the establishment of a country-wide HMB service network, integrating HMB services into other breastfeeding promotion activities in health facilities, and increasing access to human milk for all infants.

¹ There were 62,053 births in Ireland in 2017, according to the Central Statistics Office (https://www.cso.ie/multiquicktables/quickTables.aspx?id=vsa02_vsa09_vsa18)