

INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING.

A WHO/UNICEF Meeting on Infant and Young Child Feeding was held in Geneva, Switzerland, October 9-12, 1979, attended by governmental, non-governmental, and infant food industry representatives. Five working groups outlined a series of recommendations which were incorporated into a final statement. The parts of the statement and the recommendations that relate to nutrition and food are abstracted below.

Breastfeeding is an integral part of the reproductive process, the natural and ideal way of feeding the infant, and a unique biological and emotional basis for child development. This, together with its other important effects on prevention of infections, health and well-being of the mother, child spacing, family health, family and national economics, and food production, makes it a key aspect of self-reliance, primary health care, and current development approaches. It is therefore the responsibility of society to promote breastfeeding and to protect pregnant and lactating mothers from any influences that could disrupt it.

In order to accomplish this task, health services should ensure that :-

- Obstetrical procedures and practices promote and support breastfeeding.
- Breastfeeding be initiated as soon as possible after delivery (normally within the first half hour).
- Mothers be encouraged and permitted to keep their babies with them post-partum to facilitate on-demand feeding.
- Supplementary bottlefeeding of water or formula be discouraged for optimal breastfeeding.
- No complementary feeding be started before 4-6 months if the mother is healthy, well-nourished, and fully breastfeeding her infant.
- Preference be given to contraceptives which do not interfere with lactation.

- Facilities be made available to mothers of hospitalized infants so that they can continue to breastfeed.
- All health workers who provide information to mothers on breastfeeding be committed to the promotion of breastfeeding.

Education programs should :-

- Provide mothers with enhanced understanding and acceptance of breastfeeding.
- Include other family members (fathers, grandmothers, etc.) who can encourage breastfeeding.
- Teach mothers about suitable weaning foods which can be made in the home from locally available foods.

The work place should :-

- Provide facilities so that working women may breastfeed.
- Ensure job security for pregnant and lactating workers.

Participants in the sessions concerned with infant formula marketing practices decided that there should be an international code regulating the marketing of infant formula and other products used as breastmilk substitutes. The code should be supported by both exporting and importing countries and observed by all manufacturers. WHO/UNICEF has been asked to organize the process to prepare such a code, being sure to involve all concerned parties. Included in this code would be such statements as :-

- There should be no sales promotion (including promotional advertising) of products to be used as breastmilk substitutes or bottled supplements and feeding bottles to the public.
- Promotion of such products to health personnel should be restricted to factual and ethical information.
- Facilities of the health care system should never be used for the promotion of artificial feeding.
- Advertising or promotional distribution of samples of breastmilk substitutes through health service channels should not be allowed.



- Artificial feeding should not be openly demonstrated in health facilities.
- In order to avoid the risk of conflict of interest, no personnel paid by companies producing or selling breast-milk substitutes should be allowed to work in the health care system, even if they are assigned more general responsibilities that do not directly include the promotion of formula.
- Foods produced and distributed for infants and young children should be labeled to indicate proper and safe home preparation.
- Governments should adopt the recommended international standards covering foods for infants and young children that have been developed by the Codex Alimentarius Committee on Foods for Special Dietary Uses.
- Products that are not suitable alone as weaning foods should be required by proper regulations not to be packed, labeled, advertised, or otherwise promoted in ways that suggest that they be used as a complement or substitute for breastmilk.

The entire group strongly expressed the opinion that these recommendations, in particular those on marketing, if accompanied by strong local government commitment and enforcement, should correct some of the poor feeding practices reported through the world.

(Copies of the complete "Statement on Infant and Young Child Feeding" FHE/ICF/REF/6/Rev.2 may be obtained by writing to: WHO: Geneva, Switzerland).