



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MEDIA RELEASE

To: Editors & Health Journalists
Issued by: Ministry of Health
Date: 12 December 2016

Health Department calls for more investment to create enabling environment for breastfeeding

Johannesburg: Breastfeeding is the best investment moms and society can provide to infants. We therefore need to create an enabling environment that supports breastfeeding.

This was the message by the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla to more than 500 delegates from more than 60 countries during the opening day of the World Breastfeeding Conference.

The four day long Conference which is hosted by the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), in partnership with the National Department of Health is being held at the Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre, in Johannesburg from 11 – 14 December 2016 under the theme: *Let's Invest in Creating an Enabling Environment for Mothers and Babies.*

Worldwide, breastfeeding rates are at a comparative low, which increases the risk of childhood diseases and infant mortality. The 2nd World Breastfeeding Conference will bring together like-minded breastfeeding advocates whose collective objective is to attain targets set for maternal, infant and young child nutrition.

Poor nutrition in the first 1,000 days of children's lives (from conception to 24 months after delivery) can have irreversible consequences for health. On the other hand good nutrition through exclusive breastfeeding for six months significantly improves a child's chances of survival and long-term good health.

According to the Lancet Breastfeeding series, exclusive breastfeeding for up to six months can reduce under five mortality rates by 13% making it the single largest high impact intervention compared to the other child survival programmes – and breastmilk free! In addition, breastfeeding reduces the incidence of type 2 diabetes by as much as 35% and the incidence of obesity by 13%.

Dr Phaahla said an enabling breastfeeding environment is one that ensures that women have access to breastfeeding counseling and support, as well as to legal protection and social support to breastfeed everywhere, in public and at work.

"We need to create a conducive environment for mothers to breastfeed their babies anywhere, anytime by supporting them as partners, families, employers and communities", he added.

In 2011, South Africa declared its commitment to the promotion, protection and support for breastfeeding, with the Tshwane Declaration. However, many mothers still encounter obstacles preventing them from exclusively breastfeeding for those critical first 6 months. In South Africa – exclusive breastfeeding has improved to one in three infants exclusively breastfed at 14 weeks of age. This is an improvement from less than one in ten in 2012 but we still have a long way to get universal exclusive breastfeeding.

Mothers may not be adequately informed about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and may not always receive the correct advice and support from health professionals. The manufacturers of breast milk substitutes also contribute to low breastfeeding rates as they promote their products as being as good for the baby – they are not!

It is also important for HIV-positive women to know that breast feeding is good for their babies too! Breastfeeding is good for babies and moms even when the mom is HIV positive provided that mom takes her ARVs regularly.

Moms may think that breast milk alone is insufficient for baby to grow along with the perception that a fat baby is a healthy baby. This often leads to the early introduction of solid foods. Well intentioned family or community members may encourage early introduction of solid foods or other liquids, before the recommended 6 months of age. These perceptions and ideas are wrong – breast milk alone for 6 months is best for babies.

The Regional Coordinator for IBFAN Africa, Ms. Barbara Nalubanga says she hopes the Conference brings about universal understanding of the need to have national budget lines for implementation of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, and its translation into national operational plans with the allocation of adequate resources.

High on the Conference's agenda is a focus on women's rights, children's rights, and the right to food, nutrition and maternity protection. Awareness will be increased among delegates on the need to protect breastfeeding from commercial interests as well as conflicts of interest in policy and programmes. Areas that are fundamental to achieving good nutrition, such as the Framework for Action on Child Nutrition, including emerging issues of obesity and HIV/AIDS, will also be discussed.

The Conference aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the need for collective action, the importance of adoption and alignment of regional and country level strategies, and will focus on a plan towards attainment of targets set in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 2nd World Breastfeeding Conference is supported by USAID, UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, Centre of Excellence – Wits University, SACSoWACH, and FAO among other partners.

For more information on the conference, please visit
<http://worldbreastfeedingconference.org/agenda.html>

For Media Enquiries, please contact:

Mr Popo Maja, Head of Communications: National Department of Health

Phone: 072 585 3219/012 395 9591

Email: Majap@health.gov.za