



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## MEDIA STATEMENT

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### Health Minister calls for support for breastfeeding mothers

**Pretoria:** As South Africa joins the rest of the world in marking World Breastfeeding Week which is celebrated during the first week of August, Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi calls on all communities, families, employers and general public to support breastfeeding mothers by creating an enabling environment to breastfeed their babies.

"Breastfeeding is a human right, not just a woman's issue or the sole responsibility of a woman, but the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding is a collective societal responsibility", said Motsoaledi.

The South African Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS) report released earlier this year revealed that the rate of exclusive breastfeed at 6 months has increased from 8% in 2003 to 32% in 2016. However, we are still far from having at least 50% of mothers breastfeeding for at least 6 months. Moreover, less than a fifth of the mothers continue to breastfeed for the recommended 24 months.

A substantial body of evidence shows that breastmilk contains antibodies that protect babies from diarrhoea, respiratory, ear, urinary tract infections and other childhood diseases. Breastfed babies are less likely to be overweight and to develop type-II diabetes later in life.

Breastfeeding is a critical first step on a child's path to a healthy future, and conditions make it difficult for women to breastfeed exclusively for at least six months up to two years or longer as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO), may be seen as human rights violation for both the mother and her baby.

The Department of Health in partnership with UNICEF-SA has launched a breastfeeding campaign to encourage families and communities to support breastfeeding mothers. The campaign asks questions such as **"why don't families support mothers to breastfeed?"** and **"why don't communities support mothers to breastfeed?"**

The campaign also encourages community members to pledge their commitment to breastfeeding on social media through the hashtag **#breastfeed2day**. The aim is to increase breastfeeding support to reach a target of at least 50% of mothers exclusively breastfeeding their babies for the first 6 months.

Breastfeeding Week is held annually between the 1st – 7th of August to encourage breastfeeding and improve the health of babies around the world. This year the theme for the week is: "***Sustaining Breastfeeding Together***". The theme focuses on working together for the common good of supporting mothers to breastfeed. It also highlights the need for partnerships at all levels, working towards sustaining breastfeeding.

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