



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK- 2014

**Pretoria, 1 August 2014** – World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) takes place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> August annually. This year's theme is "**Breastfeeding: A Winning Goal – for Life**". The theme highlights the importance of increasing and sustaining the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding to reach Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 to improve maternal and child health.

The **under 5 mortality** (MDG 4) can be readily reduced by about 13% with improved breastfeeding practices alone, and 6% with improved complementary feeding. In addition, about 50-60% of under-5 mortality is linked to malnutrition, due to inadequate complementary foods and feeding following on poor breastfeeding practices.

**With respect to improved Maternal Health (MDG 5)** breastfeeding is associated with decreased maternal postpartum blood loss, decreased rates of breast, ovarian and, endometrial cancers, and the likelihood of bone loss post-menopause.

The policy of the Department of Health, in line with the World Health Organisation and UNICEF, is that mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, that mom's exclusively breastfeed their infants for the first six months of life and introduce appropriate complementary foods from 6 months onwards in addition to continuing breastfeeding to achieve optimal growth, development and health.

HIV positive mothers must also exclusively breastfeed for six months, start with complementary foods and continue to breastfeed for 12 months. The HIV positive mother must be enrolled into the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Programme (PMTCT) and receive antiretrovirals to prevent the transmission of the virus whilst breastfeeding.

Breast feeding is best for babies. Exclusive breastfeeding (only breastmilk) for the first six months compared to mixed breastfeeding (giving breast milk and other foods or fluids) has been shown to play a major role in reducing the incidence of diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and allergies. Breastfed babies also have a lower risk of becoming obese, becoming a diabetic, having cancers and heart disease later in life, as well as a lower risk of allergies, asthma, wheezing and rashes. There are many benefits for mothers too, as breastfeeding lowers the risk of breast and ovarian cancers, as well as osteoporosis and promotes bonding between moms and their babies.

### **Breastfeeding needs to be protected, promoted and supported by ALL**

To reach the goal of exclusive breastfeeding and continued breastfeeding mothers need support from family, friends, employers, childcare providers and health services.

A National Breastfeeding Consultative Meeting was held in August 2011 at which South Africa committed to actively promote and support breastfeeding as one of the most effective interventions at improving child health.

South Africa already has 62% of the public health facilities with maternity beds accredited as Mother and Baby Friendly. The aim of this global strategy is to create a healthcare environment where, amongst other things, breastfeeding is the norm. The Department is continuing to support all health facilities to become Mother and Baby Friendly.

Babies who are very premature, very low birth weight and newborns that are too ill to suckle are those at greatest risk of not receiving the lifesaving benefits of breastmilk. For these newborns, breastmilk from their own mother is still the best option. When this is not possible, the next best option is donor human milk from an established human milk bank. Provinces have embarked on scaling-up the establishment of human milk banks. Some of the hospitals that have breastmilk banks are Kalafong, Leratong, Far East Rand, Kimberley, Mafikeng, G Morolong, Bloemfontein Universitas, Pelonomi, Greys Hospital, and Witbank Hospital.

South Africa published Regulations relating to Foodstuffs for Infants and Young Children in December 2012 that protects the public from aggressive or inappropriate marketing of breastmilk substitutes such as formula milk, milk-like drinks and teas specifically marketed as suitable products for infants and young children.

Families, communities, and employers are encouraged to provide a supportive environment within families, communities and the workplace to support moms to breastfeed. Employers, for example, can support breastfeeding mothers by providing at least 2 breastfeeding breaks, a comfortable room that can be used to breastfeed or to express the milk for the baby to feed the next day.

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