

MEDIA ADVISORY

To: Editors & Health Journalists
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World Breastfeeding Week Commemoration: 1-7 August

South Africa will this week (1-7 August) join the global community to commemorate the World Breastfeeding Week as part of ongoing efforts to raise awareness about the vital health, social and economic benefits of breastfeeding for infant survival and maternal well-being. Breastmilk remains a baby's first vaccine and best protection they need against illness and disease.

South Africa continues to face suboptimal breastfeeding practices, with the national exclusive breastfeeding rates at 22%, and this is below the global targets of 60% set for the year 2030, indicating the need for sustained, year-round breastfeeding support. According to the World Health Organization, almost 48% of infants under six months were exclusively breastfed globally as of 2024.

South Africa remains committed to achieve the global breastfeeding targets of 60% by the year 2030, and this requires all hands on deck to reduce infant mortality, combat childhood malnutrition, and lower maternal health risks. At the current moment, the burden of malnutrition among children under five remains high.

Breastmilk is the ideal food for infants. It is safe, clean and contains antibodies which help protect against many common childhood illnesses. Breastmilk provides all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs for the first months of life, and it continues to provide up to half or more of a child's nutritional needs during the second half of the first year, and up to one third during the second year of life.

The 2026 World Breastfeeding Week Campaign is commemorated under the theme: *"Breastfeeding for a Sustainable Start in Life: Strengthen What Works"*. The theme focuses on the impact of breastfeeding on nutrition, food security, poverty reduction as well as breastfeeding protection and promotion through cost-effective breastfeeding interventions that require strengthening instead of searching for new methods.

Breastfeeding is important for the babies especially in the first 6 months after birth as it provides full nutritional benefits for baby. The Department encourages mothers to initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusively breastfeed for the first six months, and continue breastfeeding alongside appropriate complementary foods until two years and beyond. Breastfeeding provides emotional and economic benefits for both the baby and the mother.

The National Department of Health in collaboration with the Eastern Cape Provincial Health Department, World Health Organization, UNICEF and other stakeholders in the sector, will this week conduct the World Breastfeeding Week community outreach activities in the Eastern Cape.

This event brings together pregnant women, mothers, fathers health workers and communities to observe a joint breastfeeding session while similar events will be held in other provinces across the country to build a strong support system. Breastfeeding is a shared responsibility. Government, employers, families, communities and healthcare workers all have a critical role in creating conducive environments that enable mothers to breastfeed effectively.

Members of the media are invited to join event as follows:

Date: Tuesday, 04 August 2026

Time: 09h00

Venue: Nkondlo African Gospel Church in Engcobo, Chris Hani District Municipality - Eastern Cape province

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