



## BREASTFEEDING

### BACKGROUND

Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants. It is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers. Breast milk provides all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs for the first months of life. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months followed by breastfeeding and supplementary food thereafter is the optimal way of feeding infants. To enable mothers to establish and sustain exclusive breastfeeding, important actions are initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of life and support of breastfeeding on demand.

Breast milk promotes sensory and cognitive development, and protects the infant against infectious and chronic diseases. Breastfeeding contributes to the health and well being of mothers, by helping to space births and reducing the risk of ovarian and breast cancer. It is a secure way of feeding and is safe for the environment.

While breastfeeding is a natural act, it is also a learned behaviour. Mothers require active support for establishing and sustaining appropriate breastfeeding practices. While improved maternity services help to increase the initiation of exclusive breastfeeding, support throughout the health system is required to help mothers sustain exclusive breastfeeding.

Women and families have a right to receive accurate information about the benefits of breastfeeding and its management, so that they can make an informed decision on how their newborn will be nourished. ICM supports the recommendation of the World Health Organization for exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Further, the Confederation supports the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 24 in its aspirations for the health of children.

## POSITION

The ICM will:

- actively work with other international organisations and government agencies in the promotion and support of breastfeeding
- ensure that the scientific programme for each International Congress contains a component assigned to presentations on breastfeeding, including developments relating to HIV/AIDS
- utilise its communication channels with midwives associations to keep them informed on developments in breastfeeding and lactation
- ensure that, within any document relating to the provision of care to women and their newborns, there will be an element relating to the role of midwives in protecting, supporting and promoting breast feeding

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Member associations are urged to:

- work with national and international organisations to promote and support breastfeeding
- provide their midwife members with up-to-date evidence on breastfeeding and on the developments relating to HIV/AIDS , and encourage breastfeeding if the mother and baby are on ARV's
- encourage their midwife members to educate other health professionals in the importance of breastfeeding
- ensure midwifery education programmes contain adequate provisions for students to gain competency in supporting breastfeeding women
- encourage their midwife members to accept their unique and vital role in the promotion of breastfeeding at all levels of the communities within which they live
- prohibit any form of promotion of breast milk substitutes
- proactively seek government legislation that promotes breastfeeding
- monitor the compliance of vendors with International Code of Marketing of infant milk products
- work with government agencies to support legislations and provision of community support to breast feeding

## RELETED ICM DOCUMENTS

ICM Position Statement. Exclusive breast feeding and HIV Infection (2008)

ICM Position Statement. Care of the newborn (2011)

ICM Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice (2010)

## OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

IPA/ICM/FIGO/WHO. Joint Statement on Breastfeeding including Breastfeeding by HIV-Infected Mothers (2010)

UNICEF. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

UNICEF. Innocenti Declaration on Infant and Young Child Feeding (2005)

WHO/UNICEF. The Baby Friendly Initiative (1990)

WHO. *Ten facts on breastfeeding*. Factsheet (2009)

WHO. WHA Resolution 54.2 Infant and young child feeding (2001)

WHO. *Exclusive breastfeeding best for babies everywhere*. Statement (2011)

### **Adopted at Brisbane International Council meeting, 2005**

Reviewed endorsed at Durban International Council meeting, 2011

*Due for next review 2017*