

PRESS RELEASE
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**World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action**

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Needless Deaths and Suffering of Babies in China

WABA, the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action - sympathises with the Chinese families on the tragic deaths and outbreak of illness of their “bao beis”, precious infants, as a result of consuming melamine-tainted infant formula. China is not the only country which has experienced problems with ensuring the safety of artificial infant milk.

There have been 71 occasions in recent years when companies have been forced to recall batches of formula because of dangerous contamination. This poses an additional hazard on top of the daily universal danger of mixing and using formula incorrectly in the home, which also makes many babies ill.

While the most stringent of measures should be taken against unscrupulous and unethical milk companies, WABA calls urgently for renewed support for early, exclusive and continued breastfeeding, and for additional resources to be mobilised to make this possible.

"The answer to the risks of infant formula is to renew support for breastfeeding," pointed out Dr. Felicity Savage, Chair of the Steering Committee of WABA. "The widespread use of commercial formula, with all of its risks and side effects even when not contaminated with toxins, is a real danger for infants and young children all over the world, including in wealthy countries."

Optimal infant and young child feeding is defined globally as early and exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a child's life, and continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years or longer, with the gradual introduction of age-appropriate, nutrient rich complementary foods from 6 months.

Recently, national and international funding for public education and the training of health workers to support breastfeeding has decreased. As a result there has been a decline in the numbers of hospitals implementing the WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, which incorporates the Ten Steps for Successful Breastfeeding, and disallows the unethical promotion of breastmilk substitutes in health facilities. In China, for example, at one time, maternity hospitals fully supported breastfeeding and the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. However, by the high level of formula use reflected in this pandemic, the practice may no longer be true.

The public deserves to be accurately informed that infant formula, as the name states, is a risky mix of animal milk with chemicals, devoid of any immunological protective factors. Formula-feeding is known to result in sub-optimal infant nutrition, and reduced cognitive development, compared to the improved health and developmental outcomes for babies who receive their own mothers' milk.

“A tragedy such as this should not happen again. The majority of mothers, given appropriate support, timely and accurate information and protection from aggressive marketing of infant formula, are able to breastfeed,” said Susan Siew, Co-Director of WABA. “For working

mothers, both in the formal and informal sectors, we need to provide an enabling environment with adequate maternity entitlements including maternity leave, flexible work arrangements and mother-baby-friendly facilities at the workplaces.”

WABA calls upon all Ministries of Health, UNICEF and WHO, and other national and international organisations concerned with global health to renew and increase their funding and dedication to breastfeeding support throughout the first 2 years of life, not only at maternity hospitals, but in public health programmes and the community.

The first food, breastmilk, for the most vulnerable sector of the human population, our babies, must be promoted, protected and supported worldwide. Let no babies die and suffer needlessly!

For more information, kindly contact:

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Links to more detail information:

1. Risks of Formula Feeding for Infant and Children:
http://worldbreastfeedingweek.net/wbw2006/pdf/Risks_Final.pdf
2. Full Recall List of contaminated baby milks:
http://www.ibfan.org/site2005/abm/paginas/articles/arch_art/85-24.pdf
3. The Maternity Protection Campaign (MPC) Kit - A Breastfeeding Perspective:
<http://www.waba.org.my/whatwedo/womenandwork/mpckit.htm>
4. WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding:
http://www.who.int/child_adolescent_health/documents/9241562218/en/index.html
5. Innocenti Declaration 2005 On Infant and Young Child Feeding:
<http://www.innocenti15.net/declaration.pdf>

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/ UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Action Food Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). For more information, please contact: World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) • P.O.Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia • Tel: 60-4-6584816 • Fax: 60-4-6572655 • Email: waba@streamyx.com • Website: www.waba.org.my