

World Health Day, April 7, 2011:

Combat Drug Resistance: No Action Today, No Cure Tomorrow

In today's world, we are fortunate to have an arsenal of medicines to fight a variety of disease-causing organisms, including bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. Unfortunately, many of these medicines are being used inappropriately—the wrong drug prescribed, instructions not followed appropriately in the preparation or administering of the drug, or drugs unnecessarily prescribed in the first place. This medicinal misuse is leading to a serious consequence: Antimicrobial Resistance.

What Is Antimicrobial Resistance? (from the World Health Day website, http://www.who.int/world-health-day/2011/WHD201_FS_EN.pdf)

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is resistance of a microorganism to an antimicrobial medicine to which it was previously sensitive. Resistant organisms (they include bacteria, viruses, and some parasites) are able to withstand attack by antimicrobial medicines, such as antibiotics, antiviral, and antimalarials, so that standard treatments become ineffective and infections persist and may spread to others. AMR is a consequence of the use, particularly the misuse, of antimicrobial medicines and develops when a microorganism mutates or acquires a resistance gene.

The Global Consequences of AMR

- Infections caused by these resistant microorganisms often do not respond to standard treatments, leading to prolonged illness and greater risk of death.
- Patients infected with these resistant microbes stay sick longer and are thus more likely to spread the disease to others.
- When standard treatments don't work, more expensive therapies are needed. AMR sends health care costs spiraling upwards, adding financial burden to families and societies.
- The challenge of controlling common infections that no longer respond to standard treatments increases the risk for life-saving treatments such as organ transplants, cancer chemotherapy, and major surgery.
- The relative ease of global travel and trade makes global spread of these resistant organisms a real concern.

What Does AMR Have to do with Breastfeeding?

In an ideal world, there would be no disease-causing organisms, and nobody would ever get sick. The next best thing, however, would be to prevent as much illness as possible, both by creating strong immune systems that reduce the likelihood of an infection taking hold, as well as creating strong defense mechanisms to fight any infection that one might be exposed to.



Breastfeeding does both, offering protection to both mother and baby:

- **Breastfeeding provides immune protection for the infant until his own immune system has a chance to mature.** Colostrum, the first milk a mother provides for her newborn, is nature's first immunization, packed with disease-fighting components that seal the newborn's gut lining to protect from invading microorganisms.
- **Mother's milk continues to provide protection by delivering disease-specific antibodies for microorganisms she's been exposed to.** And, in an amazing feat of natural ingenuity, her breast manufactures antibodies to fight microorganisms to which her baby has been exposed.
- **Breastfeeding enhances the protective effect afforded by other immunizations, decreasing the likelihood of infection.**
- **Breastfeeding's immunological protection continues for as long as breastfeeding continues,** and even confers lifelong risk reduction for a long list of serious health conditions, including some cancers, obesity, etc.

- *Even if a breastfed infant does get sick, the illness is typically less severe* and of shorter duration than it might be otherwise.

So What Can You Do to Fight AMR?

- Breastfeed your babies!
- Encourage women to breastfeed, through community support programs and policies, as well as one-on-one.
- Practice simple hygiene precautions to avoid illness—wash your hands frequently, cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough, and teach your children to do the same.
- Stay away from others who are sick—and stay away from others if you are sick.
- Realize that not every illness will respond to medication. Antibiotics do no good, for example, fighting viral illnesses.



- If you get sick and need medication, ask your health care professional to prescribe treatment that is compatible with breastfeeding—and then follow directions carefully, including finishing the medication as directed.



Realistically speaking, breastfeeding can't completely solve the issue of antimicrobial resistance. It is an indirect solution to the problem. But it is free, readily available, and contributes to the overall health of the world.

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For more information, contact:



LLLI at <http://www.llli.org>



WABA at <http://www.waba.org.my/>



LA LECHE LEAGUE
INTERNATIONAL

La Leche League International (LLLI) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1956 by seven women who wanted to help other mothers breastfeed their babies. LLLI, the world's largest resource for breastfeeding and related information, offers encouragement worldwide through mother-to-mother support and breastfeeding mother support groups in 69 countries.



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 Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLLI), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). • Address: P.O. Box 1200, 10850, Penang, Malaysia • Tel: 604-6584816 • Fax: 604-657 2655 • Email: waba@waba.org.my • Website: www.waba.org.my