

Joint Statement in celebration of World Health Day

7 April 2015



World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action



LA LECHE LEAGUE
INTERNATIONAL

Food Safety

The 2015 World Health Day (WHD) theme is “Food Safety.” From the World Health Organisation (WHO):

Unsafe food is linked to the deaths of an estimated 2 million people annually—including many children. Food containing harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemical substances is responsible for more than 200 diseases, ranging from diarrhea to cancers.¹



There are many opportunities for food contamination to take place. Today's food supply is complex and involves a range of different stages including on-farm production, slaughtering or harvesting, processing, storage, transport, and distribution before the food reaches the consumer.²

Food Safety Facts from the World Health Organisation¹:

- Access to safe and nutritious food is key to sustaining life and promoting good health.
- Unsafe food containing harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemical substances causes more than 200 diseases—ranging from diarrhea to cancers.
- Food safety, nutrition and food security are inextricably linked—unsafe food creates a vicious cycle of disease, malnutrition and death.



Breastfeeding and Food Safety

Breastfeeding provides safe, nourishing food for infants and children:

- Human milk is perfectly suited to the nutritional needs of the child. It develops in accordance to a child's growth—from newborn to toddler and beyond.
- Human milk—delivered directly from the breast—bypasses any need for equipment to collect and store the milk. This reduces the chances of milk contamination due to poor sanitation practices.
- A newborn's digestive tract contains no bacteria. The food he/she consumes populates the gut and helps develop "friendly" gut bacteria, e.g. those produce which lactic acid and are vital for good health.³
- Breastfeeding acts as a potable source of water for infants and children. Exclusively breastfed infants do not need supplementary water.
- The closer the consumer (child) is to the producer (mother) of the food, the lower the risk of contamination.
- The production, transportation, and distribution of infant formula increases the risk of contamination which can be bypassed by breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding plays an important role in the overall health of both baby and mother. In general, diseases have the least negative impact on those who are strong and healthy to begin with.

"Breastmilk gives growing children nutritious affordable food and helps protect against a variety of illnesses and infections..."⁴

What about Complementary Food?

Breastfeeding provides all the nutrition, including water, needed by a child during the first six months of his/her life. Complementary food is not needed at this stage but by the time it is introduced, the baby will be stronger and more able to withstand potential contamination from complementary food.

Once the infant begins eating solid food (usually beginning in the middle of the first year), it is important that this food is carefully selected based on nutritional value and safety. The WHO's Five Keys to Food Safety¹ are:

- Key 1: Keep clean
- Key 2: Separate raw and cooked food
- Key 3: Cook food thoroughly
- Key 4: Keep food at safe temperatures

Key 5: Use safe water and raw materials

Breastfeeding for at least two years—or as long as mother and child wish to continue—will provide the child with nutritious and safe human milk which can offset the potential risk of solid food.

What about Expressed (or Pumped) Breast Milk?

Many mothers express milk for their babies—by hand or pump—which may allow for contaminants to get into the milk. The potential points of contamination include skin (hands, breast), pump equipment, storage vessels, storage practices (where, how long), and delivery of the milk to the infant.

Fortunately, there are simple steps mothers can take—washing hands and any vessels used to collect and store the milk—to reduce contamination. Although expressed milk separates the “consumer” (child) from the “producer” (mother), it is still fewer degrees of separation in comparison to infant formula production and delivery. Guidelines for safe collection and storage of human milk can be found here: <http://www.illli.org/faq/milkstorage.html>

Expressed breastmilk is a relatively safe alternative—and far superior to infant formula—when breastfeeding is not an option.

What Happens if the Mother is on Medication?

Usually, medication given to breastfeeding mothers will not pose a serious threat to the child. However, safer alternatives can often be used, in combination with appropriate timing of feedings and dosage of medication. It is always better to discuss medication consumption with a healthcare provider, and to weigh this against proven benefits of breastfeeding.

What about Environmental Pollutants?

Mothers want the best for their children, and may worry about news reports which are quick to present cases of pollution in human milk samples. Measuring contaminants in human milk samples alone does not provide the full picture. Environmental pollutants are everywhere, not just in human milk. Still, the benefits of breastfeeding far outweigh the potential risks of environmental pollutants.



“Studies have shown that breastfeeding, even in a contaminated environment, has a positive impact on the development of children as compared to those who are artificially fed. Breastfeeding supports infant growth and health as well as maternal health in ways that breastmilk substitutes cannot. Indeed, breastmilk contains substances that help the child develop a stronger immune system and other protections against environmental pollutants and pathogens.

Therefore, educational and advocacy efforts to promote a toxic-free future for our children should recognise, encourage, and support collective actions aimed at promoting breastfeeding, reducing chemical contamination and developing

the strongest possible pollution prevention laws."

The Key Message

Providing safe food for our children is imperative, and the simple act of breastfeeding provides a safe, clean, nourishing, and protective source of food from birth through a child's early years. The protection developed during these critical first years will provide a strong base that lasts a lifetime.

For more information, please contact:

Key Writer: [Melissa Clark Vickers](#)

LLL Leader

WABA Secretariat: [Chuah Pei Ching](#)

Health & Information Officer

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2. WHO--[10 Facts for Food Safety](#)
3. [Establishment of Intestinal Microbiota during Early Life: a Longitudinal, Explorative Study of a Large Cohort of Danish Infants](#); Anders Bergström, Thomas Hjort Skov, Martin Iain Bahl, Henrik Munch Roager, Line Brinch Christensen, Katrine Tschentscher Ejlerskov, Christian Mølgaard, Kim F. Michaelsen and Tine Rask Licht; Appl. Environ. Microbiol. May 2014 vol. 80 no. 9 2889-2900; DOI: 10.1128/AEM.00342-14.
4. [Ten Links for Nurturing the Future Action Tool: Food Security](#). Penny Van Esterik
5. [Water and Sanitation](#) (ILCA/LLLI/WABA statement)
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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 (LLL)*, *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 •



La Leche League International (LLL) is a non-profit organisation founded in 1956 by seven women who wanted to help other mothers breastfeed their babies. LLL, the world's largest resource for breastfeeding and related information, offers encouragement worldwide through mother-to-mother support and breastfeeding mother support groups in 70 countries. •Address: 35 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 850; Chicago, IL 60601USA • Tel: 1+312-646-6260 • Fax: 1+312-644-8557 • Website: www.llli.org •

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