



WORLD ALLIANCE FOR BREASTFEEDING ACTION



In times of crisis: mothers breastfeed to ensure food security for their babies

"I left the house suddenly and I didn't know how long I would be in the hospital. I had so many worries but one of the biggest ones was for the baby, who is breastfed, especially after she had such a bad reaction to formula that my husband was close to calling an ambulance."

-A breastfeeding mother from Hong Kong-

Breastfeeding is a special bond shared between the [mother](#) and [child](#) that comes with many [health](#) and [economic](#) benefits, both in the short- and long-term. Breastmilk is the first food and provides food security for babies. Breastfeeding is sustainable, ecological, and good for humanity. It also contributes to the fight against [climate change and environmental degradation](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the preventive measures imposed by most countries around the world such as lockdown and restriction on border crossing has made infant feeding even more difficult. Formula feeding presents many risks including price gouging and unreliable supply chains during crises. Rural and vulnerable populations are [more susceptible](#) to these risks and are in greater danger of facing food insecurity. However, breastfeeding does pose some challenges, particularly for working parents, even under normal circumstances. Parents may not have access to consistent information and support. Mothers are also reportedly discharged early from hospitals due to lack of space and adequate staffing. Mothers may therefore not be provided with the necessary knowledge and support that they need to be able to breastfeed successfully. Breastfeeding is [a life-saving](#) intervention that is crucial and needs to be protected, promoted and supported.

"With the lockdown, there was no way for me to send my breast milk back. And my mother-in-law told me that my baby spits up more when he is fed formula, compared to breast milk. I was really worried. I was on the verge of tears."

-A Malaysian breastfeeding mother in Singapore-



From breast milk packed to be delivered back to a baby in Malaysia. (Photo courtesy of Malaysian moms working in Singapore.)

There are some positive stories from local communities who are developing creative solutions to ensure that breastfeeding can continue. Some mothers in lockdown who are currently separated from their infants are supported by their local communities to [ship their breastmilk across state borders](#).

In another case, the breastfeeding community came together to [donate breastmilk](#) to a baby in need when the mother was hospitalised and the infant had no access to breastmilk. In some places, mothers facing breastfeeding difficulties can get free help through [online video chat](#) with a lactation consultant. These are a few examples of successful community initiatives. A silver lining of the lockdown is where some mothers appreciate the time alone with their newborn babies and this has led to a better [breastfeeding experience](#) for them.

"It was genuinely humbling how ready and willing mums were to share their precious breast milk stash with a total stranger. Some mums contributed upwards of two litres each."

-A volunteer from Hong Kong Breastfeeding support group-

Communities are demonstrating how a [warm chain of support for breastfeeding](#) can actually work. However, there is so much more we can do to empower families to continue breastfeeding.



Support for all members of the breastfeeding family must be provided through appropriate and consistent communication messages. Emphasising the important skills of hand expression of breastmilk and the appropriate use of pumps are also important.

[Knowledge](#) about storage and preparation of feeds, cup feeding, maintenance of breastmilk supply and relactation must be made available. In some situations, wet nursing may be a viable option. Breastmilk should be made available for babies who have no access to their mothers, either through [human milk banks](#) or other appropriate community initiatives.

"With lactation centers closed and other non-essential employees working from home, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney announced that the city is investing in a service to help parents with breastfeeding. Free virtual breastfeeding support is available through Pacify (an App)."

- KYW Newsradio, Philadelphia-

The COVID-19 pandemic will be around for a long time to come. Mothers are defying all odds to continue breastfeeding in the time of COVID-19. As a society, we need to work together to protect and support the breastfeeding dyad to ensure food security, health and survival in these troublesome times.

WABA wishes all mothers, Happy Mother's Day!

#mothersday #WABA #breastfeeding #foodsecurity #warmchain #COVID19



World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations dedicated to 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. 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). WABA coordinates the annual World Breastfeeding Week campaign.

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