

Breastfeeding: Within One Hour of Birth Can Save One Million Babies:

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Initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of birth is the first and most vital steps towards reducing infant and under five mortality, and the overwhelmingly high neonatal mortality rate. We can save one million babies all over the world by beginning with one action, one hour support and one message: begin breastfeeding within one hour of birth.

Millennium Development Goal 4 (MDG-4) aims at reducing under five child mortality by two third by 2015. According to global data out of all 10.9 million under five deaths, roughly 4 million babies die during the first month of life. In Nepal this mean out of 30,000 newborn (up to 28 days) deaths, 7,500 lives can be saved annually by this one act alone.

For millions of years babies have been breastfed. It's natural! A mother's milk is ideal for her baby. It's the best. In fact, there is no substitution for mother's milk. Breastfeeding provides the best possible start of life, a foundation for fulfilling the right of child.

Scientific research during the last four decades have discovered that breastfeeding provide the ideal nutrition to the baby, protects them against infection, allergy and asthma. Exclusive breastfeeding during first six months promotes physical, physiological, mental and physiological growth and development.

Immediate breastfeeding is considered as the fourth stage of labour. Early initiation of breastfeeding is beneficial for both mother and baby. Suckling at breast benefits the mother also because it stimulates the release of the hormone; oxytocin, which helps in uterine contraction and prevents post partum hemorrhage in the mother. Colostrum is important for babies, as it is highly nutritious and rich in antibodies that protect the newborn from various diseases. The early initiation of breastfeeding also increases the bonding between the mother and the baby. NDHS survey of 2006 states that only 35.4% of babies were breastfed within one hour, so around 64.6% were not breastfed within one hour in Nepal. Similarly only around 85% of the babies are breastfeed within 24 hours of birth so 15% of babies are not given breast milk even at 24 hours of life. We can save the death of thousands of babies if we can initiate breastfeeding within one hour. Similarly pre-lacteal feeds will hamper the breastfeeding at the same time it will expose the newborn to varieties of infection on different items like ghee, glucose, plain water, ghuti etc. are used as pre-lacteal feeds in Nepal. According to NDHS survey of 2006 the use of pre-lacteal feeds in Nepal is 36.5%, which needs to be stopped to save the newborn lives.

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for first six months of life as it is uncontaminated and contains the entire nutrients needed by the infant in the first six months of life. In addition to the mother's antibodies in the breast milk it provides

immunity to infant from different diseases. Breastfeeding can save more lives of infants than many other intervention strategies. Contrary to the National recommendation of 'exclusive breastfeeding' for the 6 months of life, according to NDHS survey of 2006 only 53% of babies were exclusively breastfeed till 6 months of age, a drop of 15% on 5 years which was 68% in 2001 (NDHS). So there is urgent need to stop this tendency to save infant deaths.

In Nepal legislature of breast milk substitute was passed in 2051 SAARC code of breast milk substitute was developed at Kathmandu meeting in 1995 which is considered to be one of the best code on breast milk substitute in the world. But the implementation of law has not been satisfactory as breast milk substitute are freely available in the market, in spite of the legislation monitoring, licensing and quality control of breast milk substitute and sell is very weak or non existent. So there is an urgent need of strengthening the initiating and evaluating agencies to regulate the free sale of breast milk substitutes in the country.

Provision was made in the law for creation of a high level National Committee on promotion, protection and support for breastfeeding with secretary of Health as the chairperson with provision of four sub-committee a) BFHI, b) Quality Control of breast milk substitute, c) Fellowship and Research and d) Monitoring. This high level committee has been authorized to appoint supervisors to monitor the overall situation in breastfeeding. This in fact is almost non-functional. Most of the Health professionals are not trained in breastfeeding, hence they lack appropriate knowledge in promotion, protection and support for breastfeeding. So we need to activate this high level committee to improve the breastfeeding situation in Nepal. Monitoring of the sale of breast milk substitute should be done immediately with the appointment of the supervisors as per provisions in the legislation and due training should be given to all the health professionals which in the long run will be of immense help in reducing the infant mortality.

Government of Nepal recommends that the breastfeeding should be initiated within one hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life and complementary foods should be given along with breast milk after completion of 6 months and breast milk should be continued till 2 years of age along with other foods. If such an ambitions recommendation is to be successfully accomplished, breastfeeding should be encouraged and supported, pre-natly, peri-nataly and post-nataly. The message should be consistently imparted by the policy makers, specialists, physicians, nurses, dieticians, other health care providers, family, friends the community and the media. Let us get united and speak in one voice: for promotion, protection and support for breastfeeding.