
Too many newborns not receiving the 'foundation of life'

Breastfeeding mother catches the gaze of her young baby © Shutterstock

Roughly three in five babies are not breastfed within the first hour of life, putting them at higher risk of death and disease and making them less likely to continue breastfeeding, say UNICEF and WHO in a new report.

Most of these babies are born in low- and middle-income countries, says the report, [Capture the Moment](#) [1], released on the eve of [World Breastfeeding Week](#) [2] (WBW 2018), 1-8 August.

The report notes that newborns who breastfeed in the first hour of life are significantly more likely to survive. Even a delay of a few hours after birth could pose life-threatening consequences. Skin-to-skin contact along with suckling at the breast stimulate the mother's production of breastmilk, including colostrum, also called the baby's 'first vaccine', which is extremely rich in nutrients and antibodies.

"Protecting and promoting breastfeeding is a powerful policy tool governments can use to both save lives and boost the health of infants and mothers from birth." - NCDA CEO Katie Dain

"Nutritious diets, including breastfeeding, promote health and protect from NCDs across the life-course," said NCDA CEO Katie Dain. "Protecting and promoting breastfeeding is a powerful policy tool governments can use to both save lives and boost the health of infants and mothers from birth."

Many reasons for delay

Capture the Moment, which analyses data from 76 countries, finds that despite the importance of early initiation of breastfeeding, too many newborns are left waiting too long for different reasons. These include common practices, such as discarding colostrum, an elder feeding the baby honey or health professionals giving the newborn a specific liquid, such as sugar water or infant formula. All delay a newborn's first critical contact with his or her mother.

A key message of WBW 2018 is that breastfeeding not only saves lives and money, it is the **foundation of life**. "Breastfeeding helps prevent malnutrition in all its forms, ensures food security even in times of crisis and breaks the cycle of poverty," says the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), which organises the week.

"Breastfeeding is a climate-smart decision that helps ensure food security even in times of crisis," adds WABA. "Breastfeeding improves the health and wellbeing of women and children and is the foundation of a country's development and future. It is the great equaliser that can help break the cycle of poverty. Protecting, promoting and

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supporting breastfeeding is crucial for the health of our planet and its people."

During a side event at the World Health Assembly in May, the WHO Director General Dr Tedros noted, "breastfeeding gives babies the best possible start in life. Breastmilk works like a baby's first vaccine giving them all the nourishment they need to survive and thrive, so it's deeply concerning vast numbers of infants continue to be fed inappropriately."

He added: "The time is now for Member States to step up efforts to implement a more integrated response to ensure [Ten Steps \(to Successful Breastfeeding - the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative\)](#) [3]), are implemented. Scaling up breastfeeding interventions will substantially contribute to achieving the SDGs."

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