

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION SERVICES



MEDIA RELEASE

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WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK (1-7 AUGUST 2004)

This first week in the month of August is World Breastfeeding Week and the Provincial Department of Health is taking part in joining other countries of the world in promoting and to support breastfeeding. The theme this year is **Exclusive Breastfeeding: the Gold Standard**. Exclusive breastfeeding is a safe, sound, and sustainable way to feed an infant for the first six months of life. Breastfeeding should continue with appropriate complementary foods up to two years or beyond. Babies grow and develop best when they are fed in this way. Experts agree that breast milk can provide all the nutrients that a baby normally needs for the first six months.

The WHO reports that the impact of malnutrition on infants and children has been responsible indirectly for half of the 10,9 million deaths annually worldwide among children under five. Over two thirds of these deaths are often associated with poor feeding during the first year of life. For the baby, breastfeeding is a vital factor in preventing common illnesses, including diarrhoea, and respiratory tract (including pneumonia), ear, and urinary tract infections. For both, the act of breastfeeding is an essential component of learning how to mother, to providing good childcare, and to contributing to healthy growth and psychosocial development.

Mothers have the right to information so that they can make informed decisions in terms of feeding their babies.

To achieve optimal growth children should be exclusively breastfed from birth to about 6 months during this period mixed feeding should be avoided at all costs. Thereafter breastfeeding should be continued with the introduction of adequate and appropriate complementary foods based on commonly eaten foods in the home.

The road to realizing these benefits, however, is not always smooth. Breastfeeding works best when mothers are healthy, have a nutritious diet and access to personal health care and are able to receive health

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care services during and after pregnancy. Mothers must be informed about good health practices for themselves and their babies, including the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life and the appropriate use of complementary foods thereafter. Women must be able to give birth in a respectful and supportive environment with minimal interference unless medically necessary and supported by their partners after birth in maintaining appropriate breastfeeding practices.

Even when obstacles arise, breastfeeding can often be maintained with the understanding and support of a mother's critical network of family, friends, and health care providers.

Each individual can play a vital role in creating awareness about the importance of breastfeeding.

ENDS.

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