

TO: ALL MEDIA
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Media Statement: KZN Health encourages mothers to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months to save lives of babies

Following the successful launch of exclusive breastfeeding policy in KwaZulu-Natal in 2010; the Department of Health (KwaZulu-Natal) will join hands with partners to take the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding to all women in various communities.

The department will be visiting communities conducting one-on-one education and public addresses on the importance of breastfeeding. Radio talks will also be used as well as talks in health facilities (clinics and hospitals) targeting patients.

Announcing the Breast Feeding Week Campaigns which commence on the 1st to the 7th August 2011, the MEC for Health Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo says; "We want partners and families to support women when they are breastfeeding."

In 2010 the KwaZulu-Natal department of Health unveiled a revised policy on Infant and Child Feeding where the department announced that it would stop providing formula milk to mothers in public hospitals and encourage mothers to exclusively breastfeed infants for the child's first six months to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, they can be given nutritious complementary foods and continue breastfeeding up to the age of two years or beyond.

The policy review came after a World health Organisation (WHO) finding that suggested that exclusive breastfeeding of infants with only breast milk, and no other foods or liquids, for six months has several advantages over mixed breastfeeding. These advantages include a lower risk of gastrointestinal infection for the baby, more rapid maternal weight loss after birth, and delayed return of menstrual periods. No reduced risks of other infections or of allergic diseases have been demonstrated.

MEC says; "To fight all forms of malnutrition, the Department has joined hands with partners to encourage families, communities and partners to act against under-nutrition, obesity and overweight, micronutrient deficiency and other forms of malnutrition which affect hundreds of children. "Worldwide, malnutrition accounts for 11% of all diseases and causes long-term poor health and disability. But malnutrition also threatens a child's education and the development of the most vulnerable in our country."

Some babies are born each year with low birth weight in KwaZulu-Natal, meaning they did not grow to their full potential during gestation. Low birth weight babies are more likely to die in infancy. "These low birth weight babies are born this way because their mothers did not have adequate amounts of iron in their diet," says MEC Dhlomo. "Such evidence is motivating us to take action that can help protect the lives of hundreds of new-borns."

Nutrition is a critical part of health and development. Better nutrition is related to improved infant, child and maternal health, stronger immune systems, safer pregnancy and childbirth, lower risk of non-communicable diseases (such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease), and longevity. Healthy children learn better. People with adequate nutrition are more productive and can create opportunities to gradually break the cycles of poverty and hunger.

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