

World Breastfeeding Week: MEC Dhlomo urges mothers to breastfeed in order to help babies fight childhood disease (also says dialogue is needed on breastfeeding in public)

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KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has urged all mothers to breastfeed their children for as long as possible – and for society to stop making women feel uncomfortable to breastfeed in public.

The period from 01 – 07 August is World Breastfeeding Week – and, under the theme Breastfeeding: Foundation of Life, the KZN Department of Health is calling for the promotion, support and protection of breastfeeding.

"We urge mothers to breastfeed their children. There is merit in breastfeeding. If you give your child breast milk, you're giving them food and also medicine to protect them against early childhood illnesses. So, we really want to advocate for this."

"We are also not happy about people who are saying babies must not breastfeed in public, and that babies must only eat in the corners, or in the bathrooms and in the toilet. This means when you're in a restaurant, you must deny your baby food, because that is considered a bad space to breastfeed. So, we really want to talk about those issues. We need to get community dialogues on breastfeeding and issues that might discourage women from breastfeeding," says MEC Dhlomo.

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months promotes the growth and development of babies, and breast milk is the most ideal food for their nourishment during this time.



Exclusive breastfeeding means giving your baby only breast milk with no supplementary feeding of any type (no water, juice, animal milk, and solid foods). At 6 months, mothers and caregivers are encouraged to start giving complementary foods with continued breastfeeding to meet the energy requirements and nutritional needs of the child.

Breastfeeding is known to reduce the risks of breast and ovarian cancer later in life and helps women return to their pre-pregnancy weight a lot quicker.

Even despite all these benefits, breastfeeding practices have been undermined by aggressive promotion and marketing of infant formula feeds; social and cultural perceptions; and the distribution of formula milk in the past to prevent Mother to Child Transmission (MTCT) of HIV. Furthermore, breastfeeding decreases the risk of death from diarrhoea, pneumonia and malnutrition.

For mothers who cannot breastfeed their children, the Department has established [human milk banks](#) at 15 hospitals across the province. A human milk bank is a service that screens, collects, processes, and distributes human breast to these mothers.

This includes mothers of babies who are born pre-term; who may be sick; have low birth-weight; and mothers who pass away. This milk is donated by volunteer breastfeeding mothers who are not related to the recipient babies. Mothers interested in donating their excess breast milk undergo a health screening.

All donated breast milk is tested, pasteurised, and frozen and ready to be supplied to vulnerable babies in need. All healthy breastfeeding women can donate breast milk. However, they should be:

- non-smokers;
- non drug and alcohol users;
- live a healthy lifestyle and
- must be willing to undergo testing for HIV, Syphilis, TB and Hepatitis B.

Milk Banks are available at the following KZN health Facilities: Addington hospital, Bethesda hospital, Dundee hospital, Edendale hospital, GJ Crookes hospital, Grey's hospital, King Edward VIII hospital, Ladysmith hospital, Lower Umfolozi War Memorial hospital, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial hospital, Murchison hospital, Newcastle Hospital, Port Shepstone hospital, RK Khan hospital, and Stanger hospital.

Breastfeeding for mothers living with HIV: Both HIV-positive and HIV-negative mothers should breastfeed exclusively for six months, but may give their babies vitamins, minerals, and medications prescribed by a doctor.

For HIV-positive mothers, breastfeeding should continue until 24 months while taking antiretroviral treatment (ART) as directed. Mothers who are HIV-positive and on ART are encouraged to breastfeed exclusively because of the many health benefits to the baby and his/her survival. During the breastfeeding period the mother or baby should receive antiretroviral treatment or prophylaxis. Research shows that when antiretroviral treatment or prophylaxis is used by either the mother or baby, HIV transmission through breastfeeding is significantly reduced. Exclusively breastfed babies whose mothers are HIV-positive are at less risk of dying from diarrheal diseases and malnutrition than mixed-fed babies.