

Media Update

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UNICEF

Press Release

3 in 5 babies not breastfed in the first hour of life

Breastfeeding within an hour after birth is critical for saving newborn lives

NEW YORK/GENEVA/ISLAMABAD, 31 July 2018 – An estimated 78 million babies – or three in five – 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.

The report notes that newborns who are breastfed 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.

"When it comes to the start of breastfeeding, timing is everything. In many countries, it can even be a matter of life or death," says Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. "Yet each year, millions of newborns miss out on the benefits of early breastfeeding and the reasons – all too often – are things we can change. Mothers simply don't receive enough support to breastfeed within those crucial minutes after birth, even from medical personnel at health facilities."

According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys, breastfeeding rates have not seen desired improvements over the last decade (37% in 2006 & 38% in 2012). This combined with an increasing trend in bottle-feeding rates (32% in 2006 & 41% in 2012) has resulted in an undesirable situation for newborn and child health and survival.

Pakistan is determined to change the situation. The federal and provincial governments are ensuring measures to enforce protection and promotion of breastfeeding. UNICEF is supporting the Government in achieving its goal and taking this cause forward.

Most recent Multiple Indicator Cluster surveys in Pakistan show encouraging improvement in exclusive breastfeeding in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) & Gilgit Baltistan (GB). KP has recently evidenced an increase in exclusive breastfeeding rate by 10% and is currently at



57%, while GB is standing at 63%.

“Breastfeeding gives children the best possible start in life,” says Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “We must urgently scale up support to mothers – be it from family members, health care workers, employers and governments - so they can give their children the start they deserve.”

Capture the Moment, which analyzes 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, including:

- **Feeding newborns food or drinks, including formula:** 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, delay a newborn’s first critical contact with his or her mother.
- **The rise in elective C-sections:** A study across 51 countries notes that early initiation rates are significantly lower among newborns delivered by caesarean section as compared to those born by natural delivery.
- **Gaps in the quality of care provided to mothers and newborns:** The presence of a skilled birth attendant does not seem to affect rates of early breastfeeding, as in many cases, babies are separated from their mothers immediately after birth and guidance from health workers is limited, thus depriving babies of mother’s feed within first hour of the birth.

The report urges governments, donors and other decision-makers to adopt strong legal measures to restrict the [marketing of infant formula](#) and other breastmilk substitutes.

The WHO and UNICEF-led [Global Breastfeeding Collective](#) also released the [2018 Global Breastfeeding Scorecard](#), which tracks progress for breastfeeding policies and programmes. In it, they encourage countries to advance policies and programmes that help all mothers to start breastfeeding in the first hour of their child’s life and to continue as long as they want.

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About the World Health Organization

The World Health Organization directs and coordinates international health within the United Nations system. Working with its 194 Member States, WHO’s mission is to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. For more information about WHO, visit www.who.int. Learn about WHO’s work on breastfeeding [here](#). Follow WHO on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most



disadvantaged children. Across 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit www.unicef.org. Learn about the [Every Child ALIVE](#) campaign to save newborns or UNICEF's [work on breastfeeding](#). Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

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