
Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) Congress

24 to 26, October 2016

Scope and purpose

The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) was launched by WHO and UNICEF in 1991 to further the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding. The initiative helps maternity facilities worldwide to adopt optimal policies and care practices for the successful start to breastfeeding, framed in the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding. BFHI has measurable and proven impact, increasing the likelihood of babies being exclusively breastfed for the first six months.

The silver anniversary of the BFHI brings the perfect opportunity to celebrate the achievements and to set the future course to ensure that every newborn receives appropriate care and every mother is empowered to breastfeed during delivery at a maternity facility.

In 2002, the World Health Assembly endorsed the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, which proposed to *“build on past and continuing achievements – particularly the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (1991), the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (1981) and the Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding (1990) – in the overall context of national policies and programmes on nutrition and child health, and consistent with the World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition”*.

In addition, the Second International Conference on Nutrition called for the implementation of *“policies, programmes and actions to ensure that health services promote, protect and support breastfeeding, including the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative”*. Breastfeeding interventions are also included as key components of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents Health 2016-2030 as well as the Draft Final Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity.

During the past 25 years, the BFHI has been tremendously successful; with over 20,000 facilities having been designated as Baby-Friendly worldwide, however there is still a long road ahead to ensuring that every maternity facility provides an environment of protection, promotion and support to breastfeeding. Baby-Friendly designation is treated as a special award that only elite facilities can attain. Sustainability has proven difficult in many cases as the infrastructure for Baby Friendly designation typically sits outside of normal hospital accreditation processes. Mechanisms to recertify hospitals are often weak or non-existent, so hospitals that were once designated as Baby Friendly may no longer adhere to the criteria.

WHO and UNICEF are working together to develop new guidance on the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, particularly focusing on sustainability and quality standards of care. Evidence for the Steps themselves is being re-examined and new guidelines, following the Guideline Review Committee process, will be developed. Country experiences are being catalogued and, in collaboration with an External Review Group, new guidance on country implementation of the initiative will be written to reinvigorate the efforts to increase breastfeeding rates as proposed in the Global Targets.

From 24 to 26 October, WHO and UNICEF will host the BFHI Congress at the WHO headquarters in Geneva, inviting representatives from countries all around the world to celebrate achievements, examine current status, discuss new guidance, form regional networks to improve country programmes and commit with the follow up and implementation of policies and standards of care that promote, protect and support breastfeeding at maternity facility and country level.

TEN STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL BREASTFEEDING

Every facility providing maternity services and care for newborn infants should:

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff.
2. Train all health care staff in skills necessary to implement this policy.
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding.
4. Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within a half-hour of birth.
5. Show mothers how to breastfeed, and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infants.
6. Give newborn infants no food or drink other than breastmilk unless *medically* indicated.
7. Practise rooming in - allow mothers and infants to remain together - 24 hours a day.
8. Encourage breastfeeding on demand.
9. Give no artificial teats or pacifiers (also called dummies or soothers) to breastfeeding infants.
10. Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer mothers to them on discharge from the hospital or clinic.