

Breastfeeding can reduce infant mortality rate

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ISLAMABAD, Aug 1: As many as 74 out of 1,000 infants die before reaching the age of one year and 94 of them die before their fifth birthday. Out of 74, 53 infants die before reaching one month of their age due to diarrhea, pneumonia, respiratory infections and malnutrition.

These lives can be saved through exclusive breastfeeding up to the first six months of their age.

This was stated by Nadeem Iqbal, Executive Coordinator of TheNetwork on start of World Breastfeeding Week 2012 on August 1.

He said that a decade back Pakistan decided to protect its children's health by promulgating "Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002".

There is a need to show serious commitment to enforce the law to protect and support breastfeeding and regulate the unethical promotion of baby formula milk, he added.

This year global community is celebrating 20th World Breastfeeding Week under the theme "Understanding the Past — Planning the Future: Celebrating 10 Years of WHO/Unicef's Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding".

He said that after 18th constitutional amendment and devolution of health sector to provinces, Balochistan has taken the lead by adopting the law and establishing provincial Infant Feeding Board to ensure the enforcement of law. Recently Punjab has also adopted the law but Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh are yet to adopt it.

However, there are deep concerns over coordination and planning between the federal and provincial ministries for an efficient enforcement mechanism and regulate the unchecked marketing of baby formula milk, he said.

Declining breastfeeding practices are associated with increasing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and malnutrition that causes underage mortality (before 5 years), he added.

TheNetwork has recently held a study to review infant formula labeling regulations as per International Code of Marketing Infant Formula, along with the Saarc Code for the Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition.

For the purpose of analysis, 15 indicators were developed from The Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Law 2002 and 27 Samples of designated products acquired to check the status of labeling compliance in Islamabad.

The purpose of the study was to highlight the violations of the provisions of the Articles 9, 10 and 11 of breastfeeding law regarding infant formulas. It was observed that almost all the available baby formulas in Capital Citys markets were non-compliant and in violation of the breastfeeding law 2002 of Pakistan.

Nadeem Iqbal said that Pakistan was already lagging behind the performance towards achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 to reduce child mortality and 5 to improve maternal health and fear not to achieve by the set time 2015.

Article 6 of Convention on the Right of Child (CRC) recognises “the Inherent Right to Life of Every Child” and it bounds member states “to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child”.

It is worth mentioning that “Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002” was implemented a decade back since an efficient enforcement mechanism is yet to be launched as no complaint under the law has registered till date. On the other hand baby formula industry is flourishing with unchecked marketing which needs to be regulated on priority basis, he said.

Aasma Qamar, who supervised the survey regarding baby powder milk while talking to Dawn, said the companies should mention on the tin or packet of powder milk that “It cannot be a replacement to breast feeding”.