

World breastfeeding week: Call for regulation on promotion of baby formula milk

Study reveals no product in market is in compliance with the law.

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This year, the world is celebrating the 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".

Unethical promotion of baby formula milk continues to go unchecked in the country, putting the lives of infants in danger. While Pakistan has taken a positive initiative to protect children's health by promulgating the Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002, there is a need to enforce the law and regulate the sale of baby formula milk.

This was the crux of a statement issued by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection (TNCP) on Monday in connection to World Breastfeeding Week (August 1-7).

TheNetwork recently held a study to review infant formula labelling regulations as per the 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 breastfeeding law and 27 samples of designated products were acquired from Islamabad to check the status of labelling compliance.

It was observed that almost all formula milks in the market were non-compliant and in violation of the law, which highlights the need for immediate measures. Meanwhile, the product continues to flourish in the market.

According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, the infant mortality rate in Pakistan currently stands at 74. These include 53 infants who die before their first month from diarrhoea, pneumonia, respiratory infections and malnutrition. These lives, however, can be saved through promotion of breastfeeding, said the statement.

Following the devolution of the health sector, Balochistan has taken the lead by adopting the law and establishing a provincial infant feeding board to ensure its enforcement. Recently Punjab has also adopted the law. However, it is yet to be adopted by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, the statement added.

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