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'First hour breastfeeding saves 22% neonatal deaths'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In Pakistan, the infant mortality rate is 74/1000 live births indicating that around 400,000 babies are likely to die during their first year of life. According to estimates 11 percent deaths take place due to diarrhea and Acute Respiratory Infections. However, 22 percent of all neonatal deaths could be prevented if breastfeeding is initiated within one hour by all mothers.

However, due to ignorance among general population; unethical market practices by the corporate sector; the percentage of breastfeeding is very low in Pakistan. This was stated by Dr. Talib Lashari, Executive Coordinator of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection in Pakistan.

He said the Breastfeeding Week would be celebrated the world over from August 01 to 07, 2007. In Pakistan, a week

long drive of mass awareness and advocacy will be launched by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection. About 3000 members of TheNetwork would participate in this drive.

A poster will be distributed at health facilities by the members of TheNetwork. News items and articles will be written for the print media and contacts will be made with TV channels to air news and views on the importance of breastfeeding.

TheNetwork for Consumer Protection will organize a Consultative Meeting on "Breastfeeding: A key element for achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)".

The exclusive breastfeeding can reduce infant mortality in Pakistan. This will also help in achieving Millennium Development Goals 1 and 4. The Goal 1 calls for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from

hunger and Goal 4 calls for reducing child mortality by reducing by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five.

Dr. Lashari added that Government of Pakistan has promulgated the "Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002". The Ordinance protects the first right of a baby consumer-citizen to have mother's milk since first hour of birth.

However, there are many hurdles in implementation of the Ordinance. The required rules and regulations are yet to be framed. Although, the Ordinance prohibits the promotion of baby milk substitutes prepared by different companies however, promotion of such substitutes continues in one or the other way.

Therefore, there is need to advocate for implementation of the Ordinance along with awareness of health professionals and communities.