

Commercial baby foods in ration supplies or donations may cause more harm than good to health of babies

Health and nutrition of the lactating mothers and infants and young children is of particular concern during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. According to reports from different parts of the country, some philanthropic and other organisations in collaboration with local government agencies were found distributing baby foods like infant formula to mothers for feeding their infants. (Evidences of the instances are attached with this alert.)

Distribution of infant formula during emergencies is detrimental to the health and well-being of infants and children as it undermines breastfeeding and their improper use may lead to life threatening diseases like diarrhoea.

International and national guidelines recommend against donation and distribution of breastmilk substitutes.

- **UNICEF says** *"Donations of BMS by manufacturers has been shown to lead to increased use of substitutes and a reduction in breastfeeding.* These donations are playing with the life of babies of poorer families given the known dangers of powder infant formula, which according to WHO is NOT a sterile product. If, safe drinking water is not available it can be very risky. Moreover, donation of infant formula is not sustainable and can lead to diluting the milk powder, which will perpetuate undernutrition. It has been seen in the past poor people aspire to buy more that further adds to their woes of poverty. UNICEF suggests" Donations of breastmilk substitutes (BMS), complementary foods and feeding equipment should not be sought or accepted by the Government and partners".
- Dealing with Covid-19, **WHO advises** *"In a situation when the mother is unable to breastfeed or express breastmilk, relactation, wetnursing, donor human milk or appropriate breastmilk substitutes should be used. **Appropriate precautions should be taken to avoid promotion of breastmilk substitutes, feeding bottles by the health facility and the health care providers.**"*

As per the section 5 (a) of the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, Amendment Act 2003 (IMS Act) free donation and distribution of infant milk substitutes like infant formula to any other person except to an orphanage is prohibited.

To avoid the damage that free donations/supplies can cause, BPNI recommends following actions in the interest of health our nation.

1. MoHFW should immediately issue a "notification" to States, Districts and State Police that "free distribution or donations of baby foods for children under two years is harmful and prohibited"
2. MOHFW may inform the Nation through one of its daily briefings.
3. Establish a criteria for handing over a substitute for any baby after assessment of individual baby is carried out.(for its need such as in case of mother not available).
4. MOHFW may also include in its notification "Supply of provisions to meet the needs of infants/ s mall children • Counselling for lactating mothers", ([as per NDMA Plan 2019](#)), which is critical to maintaining breastmilk supply from mother to the baby.
5. District Magistrates and State Planners for Covid19 may use their authority to stop free supplies and donations of infant formula in ration supplies.

Annexure 1: Facebook video of Ladli Foundation Distributing Lactogen in Delhi:

<https://www.facebook.com/144666722367030/posts/1602227173277637/?vh=e&d=n>

Response from Ladli Foundation Trust and Photo Evidence from their twitter handle:



Manoj Parida IAS Chandigarh giving cerelac in communities

(This image credit: Manoj Parida, IAS twitter handle)



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Jalpaiguri by Prasary Foundation with Nagrakata police station



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