

April 17, 2020

Dear Dr. Harsh Vardhan,

We appreciate the role of MOHFW in leading the response to Covid19, and we salute our frontline warriors working day and night to protect our people. However, We would like to bring to your attention some key concerns in the interest of protecting health of infants and young children.

### **Baby Separated from the Mother and Bottle-feeding**

ICMR recommends that COVID19 positive and suspected mothers may be separated temporarily. Yesterday, yourself put up a video on Twitter, where in nurses feed a baby through bottle (no way to know what was in the bottle; infant formula or expressed breastmilk). This news was all over in newspapers giving different versions.

***This appears to create an impression that bottle-feeding is Normal.***

As you may be aware that breastfeeding is highly protective, and artificial feeding is dangerous is this for the baby for her immediate and long -term health. The global researchers are looking for breastmilk to be tested for Covid treatment and we may in fact lose out on this protection. <https://nypost.com/2020/04/09/scientist-calls-for-breast-milk-to-study-coronavirus-antibodies/>

The WHO recommends “*Infants born to mothers with suspected, probable or confirmed COVID-19 infection, should be fed according to standard infant feeding guidelines , while applying necessary precautions for IPC [infection protection and control]” In case the mother is sick and unable to breastfeed, her **express breastmilk should be given to the infant with a clean cup and/or spoon.** WHO has advised that **rooming-in should be practiced throughout the day and night**, whether the mother and her infant has suspected, probable or confirmed COVID-19 virus infection. Standard infant feeding guidelines include initiating breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months with timely introduction of adequate, safe and properly fed complementary foods at age 6 months, while continuing breastfeeding up to 2 years of age or beyond. 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.” (World Health Organization. Clinical management of severe acute respiratory infection when novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection is suspected. Interim guidance V1.2.) [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-is-suspected](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-is-suspected)*

In these difficult times, Government of India has the mandate to reach out with accurate information and support to all mothers considering 70,000 babies born every day. In addition focus on early breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding for two years or beyond along with adequate and diverse foods for 6-23 months babies to ensure their nutrition security to fight with Covid19 and prevent it. Katori/Cup feeding should be promoted. Messaging should be based on WHO guidelines and national guidelines on breastfeeding in emergencies. This action preserves the spirit of the *Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003.*

**We would, therefore, request you to withdraw your tweet showing bottle -feeding baby, and urge ICMR to tweak/modify its guidance according to international standards that in no way undermines breastfeeding.**

Another concern is that we have come to know that 'Infant formula' or 'powdered baby foods' are being supplied in the rapid response. Distributing infant formula freely to the poor community may undermine breastfeeding, which is a dangerous practice. Free supply of formula could do more harm if safe water is not there. Formula tends to be diluted for longer use, leading to under nutrition.

**We would also like you to immediately direct all concerned that before handing out any supplies of baby foods, an assessment for the need of formula in babies below two years may be done. If this is being used for a feeling of “not enough milk” (which is due to stress and anxiety), a breastfeeding /lactation counsellor is required rather than free formula.**

**We look forward to your urgent attention to these concerns and hope you will be able to initiate this work.**

With kind regards,

Sincerely,

Dr. Arun Gupta MD (Ped)  
Central Coordinator, BPNI <https://www.bpni.org/>  
MD, World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative(WBTi)<https://www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org/>  
Regional Coordinator- IBFAN South Asia,  
Advisor, IBFAN Global Council,  
Convener, Alliance Against Conflict of Interest(AACI) <http://www.aaci-india.org/>  
&  
Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest(NAPi) <http://www.napiindia.in/>  
BP-33, Pitampura | Delhi- 110034.  
Email id : [arun.ibfan@gmail.com](mailto:arun.ibfan@gmail.com)  
Mobile: 9899676306  
Tweet : @moveribfan  
Skype: arungupta1696

Encl. AA



Dr Harsh Vardhan ✓ @drh... · 1d ✓

अद्भुत ! इस मासूम की माँ  
#CoronaPositive है। इंसानियत को जिंदा रखते हुए @aiims\_rpr की ये दो #nurse अपनी गोदी में एक माँ की भाँति इस बच्ची की देखभाल कर रही हैं, उसे दूध पिला रही हैं। देश भर के #nursingstaff #medicalstaff को #Salute

राष्ट्र सेवा सर्वोपरि !

#salutecoronawarriors



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