



## Joint Media Brief of BPNI and AHPI

# Why Maternity Hospitals are going for Accreditation to be “Breastfeeding Friendly”

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*As the health professional organisations urge private hospitals to become Breastfeeding Friendly, Bloom Healthcare, Chennai becomes the FIRST to be Accredited by the National Accreditation Centre.*

### **New Delhi 17 December 2021.**

Are you sure as a mother-to-be that the hospital you have chosen will make all efforts needed to ensure your baby will be breastfed within an hour of being given birth and you will be supported in initiating breastfeeding? Will the hospital ensure skin to skin contact to the baby immediately after birth? For most mothers there is/was no such assurance. The new initiative to certify hospitals as “Breastfeeding Friendly” will help mothers in choosing a hospital which lays emphasis on supporting her choice to breastfeed her baby.

The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) and Association of Healthcare Providers of India (AHPI), comprising 12000 private hospital including maternity centres, has entered in to a strategic partnership and launched '[National Accreditation Centre \(NAC\) for Breastfeeding Friendly Hospitals](#)' for accreditation of private hospitals offering maternity services based on WHO's Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding. The objective is to assess the hospitals on policy, programmes and practices and grade them based on a key. More than 20 hospitals have applied so far and one of them has completed the process and been accredited as “Breastfeeding Friendly”.

### **Why such an initiative?**

The just released NFHS-5 reveals that nearly 90% mothers deliver in health facility. It also showed that the rate of cesarean delivery has gone up from 17.5 in NFHS-4 to 21.2% in the NFHS-5; of which 14.3% in public hospital and 47% in the private hospitals. It means every second mother delivers by Cesarean Section in private hospitals. [The World Health Organisation recommends 10 to 15% deliveries maybe conducted](#) by Caesarean section. Scientific evidence clearly shows that delivery by Cesarean Section impacts negatively on the early initiation of breastfeeding within an hour of birth and skin-to-skin

contact. A [“meta-analysis](#) showed caesarean section was associated with a 46% lower prevalence of early initiation of breastfeeding”.

While India can take pride in institutional births being 88.6%, however, news is not so good as only 41.8% mothers are enabled to breastfeed within an hour of birth and provide skin to skin contact to their babies immediately after birth. It means that 58% are NOT enabled- this is a huge number going by approx. 24.5 million births annually, 14.2 million are deprived of the mother’s milk and its benefits, violating the [human rights of both mother and child](#).

According to Dr. Girdhar Gyani the Director General of the AHPI, “this is a wonderful Initiative and will certainly change the practices in the hospitals within a few years. As the evidence shows clearly if we improve the breastfeeding rates in hospitals it reduces neonatal mortality and will impact our infant mortality rate(IMR). India’s IMR of 35 infant deaths per 1000 live births, lags behind Sri Lanka-07 and Bangladesh-24 in the South Asia region.”

While early breastfeeding rate has steadily increased from 9% in 1992 to 41% in 2015, it has not shown any increase in the last five years. “It is a matter of great concern” said Dr. Kiran Guleria, , Professor and unit Head in the department of Obstetrics & Gynecology in Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital Delhi, and a member of the expert advisory group of the NAC. She added- “There is overwhelming evidence from all continents that breastfeeding practices are affected adversely by the Caesarean section. Therefore, we need a policy and practice shift to improve breastfeeding outcomes during Caesarean section.”

The accreditation as “Breastfeeding Friendly” and monitoring of such data can make a huge difference to the lives of mothers and babies.

### **Mothers’ experiences in their own words**

Gowrishankri, a mother from Chennai said: “I did not feed my baby in the golden hour and nobody in the hospital also told about it! No breast crawl, in fact not even showed baby to me! We both were separated and baby was fed with formula without my consent, just because I had c- section.”

Another mom *Varsha Rao* from Chennai said “ I delivered my boy at 11.45 by C-section. Could not even hold him close to me even after delivery or after shifting to ward. Wanted to enjoy all things like holding him soon after delivery and feeding him but unfortunately nothing happened. I was not able to secrete milk and he was formula fed. It still hurts.”

Said Sangeetha, “I have been through tough times during pregnancy as well as post delivery . I had planned c-section ( breech position) , though I was not intimated about general anaesthesia that was given to me . I was totally in drowsy state to even see my baby for 4 hours after surgery , no golden hour , no skin to skin nothing . It gave me lots of problems in my breastfeeding journey”

Preparation of women during pregnancy increases their confidence and improves the chances of ensuring immediately skin to skin contact and early breastfeeding after surgery by cesarean section. The newly launched accreditation helps institutionalize all the policy and programme steps required to help a woman to be successful in breastfeeding after birth, whether she had a caesarean section or vaginal delivery. The accreditation includes indicators of governance, policy actions, data management, as well as steps to prepare the mother during pregnancy, and to help her at the time of birth.

According to Dr. Arjan DeWagt, Deputy Country Representative of UNICEF India, “All the health facilities must respect the key policy and effectively enforce the policy of International Code of Marketing for Breastmilk Substitutes and its subsequent related World Health Assembly resolutions which is *Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003 in India*. There should be no promotion of breastmilk substitutes, feeding bottles and teats, pacifiers or dummies in any part of facilities providing maternity and newborn services, or by any of the staff.”

Dr. Arun Gupta, a pediatrician working for over three decades to improve breastfeeding in India who designed this initiative, says “We would like to invite all the maternity hospitals in the country to check their readiness of being breastfeeding friendly by doing self - assessment. It triggers improvement of standard of care. An independent external assessment is done and if hospital receives Grade-1, it gets the accreditation. It helps them to be projected as “breastfeeding friendly” as more mothers would look for this certification adding value to their image in such a competitive environment”.

Dr. Kavitha Gautham, Director of Bloom Healthcare, the first hospital that has been accredited by the NAC, was elated with the Grade -1 it received. She said “We do want to improve our standard of care in the maternity service and found the process of accreditation very transparent and useful. We wanted to build our capacity and preparedness for helping mothers in establishing breastfeeding with in an hour of birth in both vaginal and C-section deliveries.”

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**Contact:**

Dr. Girdhar Gyani DG AHPI 98107 30040 [gyani@ahpi.in](mailto:gyani@ahpi.in)

Dr. Arun Gupta 9899676306 [arun.ibfan@gmail.com](mailto:arun.ibfan@gmail.com)

## **Notes for Editors**

UNICEF Data

<https://www.unicef.org/india/key-data>

Early initiation of breastfeeding to promote exclusive breastfeeding -WHO

<https://www.who.int/elena/titles/early-breastfeeding/en/#:~:text=WHO%20recommendations,the%20first%20hour%20after%20delivery.>

Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India <https://www.bpni.org/>

Association of Healthcare Providers of India <https://www.ahpi.in/>

'National Accreditation Centre (NAC) for Breastfeeding Friendly Hospitals'

<https://www.bfhi-india.in/home.php>

The World Health Organization recommends 10 to 15% deliveries may be conducted

<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/maternal-perinatal-health/cs-statement/en/>

Impact of caesarean section on breastfeeding indicators: within-country and meta-analyses of nationally representative data from 33 countries in sub-Saharan Africa

<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/9/e027497>

NHRC meeting to discuss the status of the Right to Food, Nutrition and related policies concludes with several key observations and suggestions (10.08.21)

<https://nhrc.nic.in/media/press-release/nhrc-meeting-discuss-status-right-food-nutrition-and-related-policies-concludes%20%20>