



International News

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Too many babies not breastfed in the first hour of life

An estimated 78 million babies – or three in five – are not breastfed within the first hour of life, putting them at higher risk of death and disease and making them less likely to continue breastfeeding, say UNICEF and WHO in a July 2018 report *Capture the Moment – Early initiation of breastfeeding: The best start for every newborn*. Most of these babies are born in low- and middle-income countries.

The report notes that newborns who breastfeed in the first hour of life are significantly more likely to survive. Even a delay of a few hours after birth could pose life-threatening consequences.

“When it comes to the start of breastfeeding, timing is everything. In many countries, it can even be a matter of life or death,” says Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. “Yet each year, millions of newborns miss out on the benefits of early breastfeeding and the reasons – all too often – are things we can change. Mothers simply don’t receive enough support to breastfeed within those crucial minutes after birth, even from medical personnel at health facilities.”

Breastfeeding rates within the first hour after birth are highest in Eastern and Southern Africa (65%) and lowest in East Asia and the Pacific (32%), the report says. Nearly 9 in 10 babies born in Burundi, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu are breastfed within the first hour. By contrast, only two in 10 babies born in Azerbaijan, Chad and Montenegro do so.¹

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said “We must urgently scale up support to mothers – be it from family members, health care workers, employers and governments.”

Capture the Moment, which analyzes data from 76 countries, finds that despite the importance of early initiation of breastfeeding, too many newborns are left waiting too long for reasons, including:

- **Feeding newborns food or drinks, including formula:** Common practices, such as discarding colostrum, an elder feeding the baby honey or health professionals giving the newborn a specific liquid, such as sugar water or infant formula, delay a newborn’s first critical contact with his or her mother.
- **The rise in elective C-sections:** In Egypt, for example, caesarean section rates more than doubled between 2005 and 2014. During the same period, rates of early initiation of breastfeeding decreased from 40% to 27%. Early initiation rates are significantly lower among newborns delivered by caesarean section. In Egypt, only 19% of babies born by C-section were breastfed in the first hour after birth, compared to 39% of babies born by natural delivery.

• Gaps in the quality of care provided to mothers and newborns:

The presence of a skilled birth attendant does not seem to affect rates of early breastfeeding, according to the report. Across 58 countries between 2005 and 2017, deliveries at health institutions grew by 18 percentage points, while early initiation rates increased by 6 percentage points. In many cases, babies are separated from their mothers immediately after birth and guidance from health workers is limited.

Earlier studies, cited in the report, show that newborns who began breastfeeding between two and 23 hours after birth had a 33% greater risk of dying compared with those who began breastfeeding within one hour of birth. Among newborns who started breastfeeding a day or more after birth, the risk was more than twice as high.

The report urges governments, donors and other decision-makers to adopt strong legal measures to restrict the marketing of infant formula and other breastmilk substitutes.

The WHO and UNICEF-led Global Breastfeeding Collective also released the 2018 Global Breastfeeding Scorecard, which tracks progress for breastfeeding policies and programmes. In it, they encourage countries to advance policies and programmes that help all mothers to start breastfeeding in the first hour of their child’s life and to continue as long as they want.

UNICEF, WHO. *Capture the Moment – Early initiation of breastfeeding: The best start for every newborn*. New York: UNICEF; 2018.

<https://www.unicef.org/publications/>.

More women can have access to drug preventing haemorrhage, WHO study shows

A new formulation of a drug to prevent excessive bleeding following childbirth could save thousands of women’s lives in low- and lower-middle-income countries, according to a study led by the World Health Organisation in collaboration with MSD for Mothers and Ferring Pharmaceuticals.

Currently, WHO recommends oxytocin as the first-choice drug for preventing excessive bleeding after childbirth. Oxytocin, however, must be stored and transported at 2–8 degrees Celsius, which is hard to do in many countries, depriving many women of access to this lifesaving drug. When they can obtain it, the drug may be less effective because of heat exposure.

The study, published in June in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, has shown an alternative drug – heat-stable carbetocin – to be as safe and effective as oxytocin in preventing postpartum haemorrhage. This new formulation of carbetocin does not require refrigeration

¹ Among countries with recent data (2013-2018).

and retains its efficacy for at least 3 years stored at 30 degrees celsius and 75% relative humidity.

“This is a truly encouraging new development that can revolutionize our ability to keep mothers and babies alive,” says Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO.

Approximately 70,000 women die every year because of post-partum haemorrhage – increasing the risk that their babies also die within one month.

The clinical trial, the largest of its kind, studied close to 30,000 women who gave birth vaginally in 10 countries: Argentina, Egypt, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda and the United Kingdom.

Each woman was randomly given a single injection of either heat-stable carbetocin or oxytocin immediately following the birth of her baby. The study found that the drugs were equally effective at preventing excessive bleeding after birth.

Since both drugs in the study were kept in at the temperatures required to ensure maximum efficacy of oxytocin, the trial may underestimate the benefit expected with heat-stable carbetocin use in real-life settings where oxytocin may have degraded due to exposure to higher temperatures.

“The development of a drug to prevent postpartum haemorrhage that continues to remain effective in hot and humid conditions is very good news for the millions of women who give birth in parts of the world without access to reliable refrigeration,” says Dr Metin Gülmezoglu, from the Department of Reproductive Health and Research at WHO.

The next step is regulatory review and approval by countries. WHO will ask its Guideline Development Group to consider whether heat-stable carbetocin should be a recommended drug for the prevention of postpartum haemorrhage.

This WHO study, also referred to as the CHAMPION (Carbetocin HAemorrhage PreventION) trial, was funded by MSD for Mothers. Heat-stable carbetocin was provided by Ferring Pharmaceuticals, the product innovator and oxytocin was provided by Novartis for the study. Following the positive results from the trial, the parties will now work to advance affordable access to this lifesaving drug in countries that have a high burden of maternal deaths.

<http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-06-2018-who-study-shows-drug-could-save-thousands-of-women%E2%80%99s-lives>.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29949473>.

Greatest ever numbers of babies and children immunised

A record 123 million children globally were immunised in 2017, according to data released in July 2018 by the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

The data show that:

- 9 out of every 10 children received at least one dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) vaccine in 2017
- An additional 4.6 million infants were vaccinated globally in 2017 compared to 2010
- 167 countries included a second dose of measles vaccine as part of their routine vaccination schedule and 162 countries now use rubella vaccines. As a result, global coverage against measles and rubella increased from 35 per cent in 2010 to 52 per cent.
- Newly available vaccines are being added as part of the life-saving vaccination package – such as those to protect against meningitis, malaria and even Ebola.

Despite these successes, almost 20 million children did not receive the benefits of full immunisation in 2017. Of these, almost 8 million (40%) live in fragile settings, including countries affected by conflict and a growing share are from middle-income countries, where inequity, particularly among the urban poor, prevents many from getting immunised.

To reach all children with much-needed vaccines, the world will need to vaccinate an estimated 20 million additional children every year with three doses of the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine (DTP3); 45 million with a second dose of measles vaccine; and 76 million children with 3 doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine.

In support of these efforts, WHO and UNICEF are working to expand access to immunisation by:

- Strengthening the quality, availability and use of vaccine coverage data
- Better targeting of resources
- Planning actions at sub-national levels
- Ensuring that vulnerable people can access vaccination services.

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/record-number-of-children-vaccinated-by-unicef-in-2017/>.

UNICEF calls for investment in family friendly policies such as paid paternity and maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks

Almost two-thirds of the world’s children under 1 year old – nearly 90 million – live in countries where their fathers are not legally entitled to a single day of paid paternity leave, according to a new UNICEF analysis.

Ninety-two countries do not have national policies in place that ensure new fathers get adequate paid time off with their newborn babies, including India and Nigeria. In comparison, other countries with high infant populations, including Brazil and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have paid paternity leave policies – albeit offering relatively short-term entitlements.

“Positive and meaningful interaction with mothers *and* fathers from the very beginning helps to shape children’s brain growth and development for life, making them healthier and happier, and increasing their ability to learn. It’s our responsibility to enable them to fill this role,” said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore.

Evidence suggests that when fathers bond with their babies from the beginning of life, they are more likely to play a more active role in their child’s development. When children positively interact with their fathers, they have better psychological health, self-esteem and life-satisfaction in the long-term.

UNICEF urges governments to implement national family-friendly policies that support early childhood development – including paid paternity leave – to help provide parents with the time, resources and information they need to care for their children.

Earlier this year, UNICEF modernized its approach to parental leave provisions, with up to 16 weeks of paid leave for fathers across its offices worldwide – the first UN agency to extend such leave beyond four weeks.

Around the world, momentum for family-friendly policies is growing. For example, in India, officials are proposing a Paternity Benefit Bill for consideration in the next session of Parliament, which would allow fathers up to three months of paid paternity leave.

However, in eight countries across the world, including the United States which is home to nearly 4 million infants – there is no paid maternity or paternity leave policy.

The new analysis forms part of UNICEF’s Super Dads campaign, now in its second year, which aims to break down barriers preventing fathers from playing an active role in their young children’s development.

Advances in neuroscience have proven that when children spend the first 1,000 days - from conception to two years old – in a nurturing, stimulating environment, new neural connections form at optimal speed. These neural connections help to determine a child’s cognitive ability, how they learn and think, their ability to deal with stress, and can even influence how much they will earn as adults.

The Lancet’s Series, Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale, launched in October 2016, revealed nearly 250 million

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