



ISSOP

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY for
SOCIAL PEDIATRICS and CHILD HEALTH

Support for breastfeeding from ISSOP for World Breastfeeding Week August 2018

In support of World Breastfeeding Week, ISSOP re-affirms its support for Breastfeeding (put link to ISSOP statement here) as a key determinant of child health in all countries. We endorse the statement by the International Pediatric Association (IPA), while stressing the importance of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (ICMBS) and elimination of potential conflicts of interest for paediatricians and their societies

Breastfeeding holds a central place in giving infants a healthy start to life through the provision of perfectly designed nutrition, protection against many diseases, and the offering of a secure attachment between mother and infant. New evidence continues to emerge of the benefits to both mother and infant of breastfeeding during the first years of life, and exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months. Pediatricians and pediatric societies should engage the media and other avenues to disseminate this message.

However, despite the life-saving and preserving properties of breastmilk, breastfeeding is under threat across the world and breastfeeding rates are falling in many countries – for example, UNICEF report rates in Thailand, Vietnam and China have decreased to 5%, 20% and 28% respectively. [1] Low breastfeeding rates are the result of lack of support for breastfeeding in the community, especially in work places, and aggressive marketing of infant formula.

It is clearly desirable for more women to enter the workforce. However, national policies such as paid maternity leave and workplace creches are indispensable for working mothers to successfully continue breastfeeding. Pediatricians and pediatric societies should advocate for expanded maternity leave and access to environments in the workplace conducive to pumping and/or nursing.

Physicians, especially paediatricians, have an important role in supporting breastfeeding, but training in breastfeeding counselling is often inadequate or non-existent in graduate and post-graduate training. Thus we advocate for more formal training in breastfeeding for all health professionals caring for infants and their mothers.

The ICMBS was developed to regulate the baby food industry and to protect mothers from aggressive marketing of infant formula, yet violations of the Code are widely reported in many countries. A further factor that is the direct responsibility of paediatricians is the Conflict of Interest that is created by many national paediatric societies and associations accepting sponsorship from the baby food industry for education and research.

Paediatricians should work with their professional societies to address conflicts of interest and pursue alternatives to formula company sponsorship.

As we recognise, this week, the overwhelming benefits of breastfeeding and the risks posed by ‘aggressive marketing of infant formula’, we call on pediatric societies and individual pediatricians to urgently strengthen support for breastfeeding by exposing violations of the ICMBS and ensuring its implementation in their practice, by avoiding Conflict of Interest in their societies, and by advocating for training in breastfeeding counselling at all levels.

Further reading:

1. UNICEF rings alarm bells as breastfeeding rates plummet in East Asia
May 2012
https://www.unicef.org/media/media_62337.html
2. Marketing of breastmilk substitutes: National Implementation of the International Code Status report 2016, WHO
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/206008/9789241565325_eng.pdf;jsessionid=ABE0FAD66BEC0D7C4B0A8745D3540DD9?sequence=1
3. Don't Push it: why the formula milk industry must clean up its act. Save the Children, 2018
<https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/Don%27t%20Push%20It.pdf>
4. ISSOP Position Statement 4: sponsoring of paediatric societies by the babyfood industry, 2014
<https://www.issop.org/category/contents/issop-position-statements/page/3/>