



health

Department of  
Health  
FREE STATE PROVINCE

**EMBARGO: IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**World Breastfeeding Week: 1 to 7 August 2013**  
***Peer Counseling and Community Support***  
***for the breastfeeding mother and her infant***

South Africa joins the rest of the world to commemorate the world breastfeeding week from 1-7 August 2013. This year's theme is "**Breastfeeding Support, close to mothers**" highlighting the importance of Peer Counseling and Community Support for the breastfeeding mother and her infant.

To reduce infant mortality and improve child health and development, the National Department of Health (NDoH) invested in interventions to improve child care practices such as infant and young child feeding, amongst others. Optimal infant feeding practices is an integral component of child survival and wellbeing. The promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding is a global priority with health benefits for both the mother and the infant and this is especially true in low to middle income developing countries where its benefits for child survival are undisputed.

Early and exclusive breastfeeding within at least an hour after delivery also has benefits for the mother. Early suckling can increase uterine activity and may reduce the risk of bleeding after delivery which is one of the most common direct complications that can lead to death of the mother after delivery.

Although breastfeeding has been proven and acknowledged to be the best option for infant feeding since early 1990, there has been systematic erosion of the practice in South Africa, with disastrous effects on infant mortality and morbidity.

Exclusive breastfeeding rates remain very low in our country, only 8% of woman exclusively breastfeed, despite evidence showing that it is THE optimal infant feeding option for babies 0-6 months. Studies have shown that although breastfeeding is a common practice in South Africa, mixed feeding rather than exclusive breastfeeding is a norm. The practice of adding other liquids and foods (water, teas and even porridge) whilst breastfeeding; is common in South Africa. Reasons usually cited for early introduction of other feeds include but are not limited to perceived milk

**MEDIA ADVISORY**

insufficiency, breastfeeding difficulties and mother returning to work. These challenges can be addressed through support from family, community and health services.

Evidence show that there are multiple influences at different levels in a mother's environment which can either support or hinder her ability and efforts to optimally feed her infant. Those implicated includes, but are not limited to, family, community, media, health care services, etc. Efforts designed to promote and support breastfeeding, such as Mother Baby Friendly Initiative targeting health care facilities, are being implemented but key to sustained breastfeeding beyond the health care facility is the support from the family and community.

It is against this background that the Department of Health together with development partners have planned to conduct community engagements with key target groups with the aim of identifying factors that have an influence on promoting and supporting breastfeeding, as well as exploring ways to overcome them.

This is in line with the 2013 World Breastfeeding Week theme – Breastfeeding Support, close to mothers – (SEE ATTACHMENT) as it highlights the importance of Peer Counselling and Community Support Systems for the breastfeeding mother and her infant. Even when mothers are able to get off to a good start, all too often in the weeks and certainly a few months after delivery, there is a sharp decline in exclusive breastfeeding rates, and breastfeeding practices. Continued support beyond the health care facility is essential to ensure sustained exclusive breastfeeding and this can be provided in a variety of ways.

Traditionally, support is provided by the family. As societies evolve, however, in particular with urbanization, support for mothers from a wider circle is needed, whether it is provided by trained health workers, lactation consultants, community leaders, or from friends who are also mothers, and/or from fathers/partners.

The Free State Department of Health will be having community engagements during World Breastfeeding Week; 1-7 August 2013. The purpose of the Community Engagement is to mobilize specific target groups within the community:



- Pregnant women,
- Grandmothers,
- Mothers of infants 0-6 months of age and
- Men/partners, to identify factors influencing optimal breastfeeding and explore innovative approaches to create/strengthen supportive practices and overcoming barriers to promoting

breastfeeding through these groups sharing experiences and perceptions on breastfeeding.

**These community dialogues will take place in Shopping Malls across the Mangaung Metro and Free State Province during World Breastfeeding Week; 1-7 August 2013.**

Pregnant and Breastfeeding mothers are invited to come to these BREASTFEEDING PROMOTION STALLS in the Shopping Malls, where they will receive advice and support from trained Midwives.

Community Dialogue with Breastfeeding Mothers will be done at the following Shopping Malls in the Mangaung Metro from Friday, 2 August to Monday, 5 August: Mimosa Mall; Loch Logan Waterfront; Brandwag Centre; Fleurdal Mall; Southern Centre, Pick and Pay Hypermarket; and Twin City Shopping Centre in Heidedal. The Community Dialogue at Pretty Gardens Nursery and Greenside Nursery will take place only on Saturday, 3 August and Sunday, 4 August.

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