

DAWN

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Govt urged to notify breastfeeding law

By A Reporter

ISLAMABAD: July 31: A national alliance on Friday urged the government to demonstrate its commitment to protecting the health and lives of children by notifying breastfeeding law in its entirety for implementation.

The representatives of National Alliance for Promotion and Protection of Breastfeeding at a press briefing highlighted the need for raising awareness among communities and health care providers for protection and promotion of exclusive breastfeeding.

While sharing the details of week long activities planned by the alliance in connection with World Breastfeeding Promotion Week, they stressed the need for building pressure to expedite the process of notification of rules and regulations of Breastfeeding Ordinance 2002.

They said as part of emergency preparedness, hospitals and other health care services should have trained health workers who could help mothers establish breastfeeding and overcome difficulties.

The World Breastfeeding Week is observed worldwide in the first week of August, and the theme for this year is "Breastfeeding - a vital emergency response. Are you ready?" It highlights the need to protect, promote and support breastfeeding in emergencies for infant and young child survival, health and de-

velopment.

According to statistics, Pakistan has higher rate of infant mortality in the South Asia. Estimated 78 infants (less than one year of age) die out of 1,000 live births in Pakistan while 57 infants are those who die during first month of their life. Apart from other factors one factor causing such a high number of neonatal deaths is lack of exclusive breastfeeding soon after the birth of the baby.

Waqar Ahmad, Executive Coordinator, The Network for consumer Protection deliberated upon this year's theme and its relevance with emergency situation in parts of the country. He said that the issue of exclusive breastfeeding has become prominent in conflict areas where formula milk had been supplied by the manufacturers in huge amount.

Therefore, there was a greater need of raising awareness among the displaced mothers of the hazardous effects of formula milk on infants, he added.

Sheeba Afghani, Communication Specialist, UNICEF talked about the capacity building of mothers, communities and health care providers.

Dr Sher Baz, ADG-Nutrition Wing, MoH said that, the MoH had formulated the rules that would be notified shortly.

Meanwhile, the Peoples Health Movement (PHM) Pakistan Chapter in a state-

ment said the initiation of breastfeeding during first hour of birth strengthens immune system and it is like first vaccination. Early initiation of breastfeeding also reduces the risk of post-partum haemorrhage in the mother - a leading cause of maternal mortality.

Sub-optimal breastfeeding practices are responsible for 1.4 million deaths of children under five years in low-income countries and worldwide. While 13 per cent of under-five years of age deaths could be saved through exclusive and continued breastfeeding until one year of age. One-fifth of neonatal deaths could be prevented by early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding (breastfeeding within the first hour).

The issue of exclusive breastfeeding has become prominent in Pakistan during recent months since it has multiplied in the wake of conflict in Swat, NWFP. Due to the conflict more than 2 million people were displaced.

The People's Health Movement Pakistan Chapter feels that this is an opportune time that the government, civil society, media and common people join hands to provide support to people facing emergency.

"We urge the government to issue rules and regulations soon regarding Breastfeeding Ordinance in order to facilitate its implementation," it adds.