

# THE NEWS

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## ■ WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

# Pre-lacteal feed increases risk of infection in infants

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There are many mistaken beliefs that are barriers to normal breastfeeding initiation. The most common amongst these is the conviction that infants need special teas or other fluids before breastfeeding. This is a totally unfounded notion. Any pre-lacteal feed (feed given before breastfeeding has started such as honey, etc.) increases an infant's risk of infection, reduces the likelihood of exclusive breastfeeding and shortens the duration of breastfeeding.

This information was shared with the media at a sensitisation session organised by the Nutrition Wing of the Ministry of Health in connection with World Breastfeeding Week, which continues till August 7.

Many people believe that colostrum is not good or even dangerous for babies. Contrary to this mistaken belief, colostrum is rich in immunologically active cells, antibodies and other protective proteins. Thus, it may serve as the baby's first immunisation. It not only protects against infections and is purgative to reduce the severity of jaundice, but also helps to regulate the baby's own immune system. Small wonder then that colostrum is called 'liquid gold' or 'the gift of life.'

In addition to the above features, colostrum also contains growth factors, which help the infant's intestines to mature and function in an effective manner, making it difficult for microorganisms and allergens to get into the baby's body. It is also thought that babies will not get enough food or fluid with only colostrums and breast-milk. Research proves colostrums as being sufficient for a baby's first feed. It is normal for a newborn to lose 3-6 percent of

## Promotion of breast-milk substitutes denounced

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TheNetwork for Consumer Protection has denounced the unethical promotion of breast-milk substitutes, which is one of the key reasons for a decline in the number of breastfed infants in Pakistan. As per international laws, baby formula milk cannot be promoted in a way that would undermine the importance of mother's milk for a baby.

"Breastfeeding is the ideal way of providing infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development," the executive coordinator of TheNetwork Dr Talib Lashari said while addressing a press conference at the beginning of the World Breastfeeding Week here on Wednesday.

Dr Lashari said the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to breastfeeding can be achieved by promoting exclusive breastfeeding within one hour by all mothers, which reduces 22 percent neonatal deaths. "The Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002, promulgated by the government in October 2002, protects the right of an infant to have mother's milk within the first hour of birth but there are many hurdles in implementation of the Ordinance," he remarked.

Dr. Lashari said studies show that non-breastfed children have higher risk of urinary tract infections, illnesses and even non-infectious diseases like insulin dependent diabetes mellitus. "According to recent studies, 78 out of 1000 infants born in Pakistan die before reaching their first birthday and 94 die before reaching their fifth birthday," he added.

birth weight. They are born with a store of water and sugar in their bodies to use at this time.

Another barrier to breastfeeding within the first hour of a child's birth is the misconception that a mother is too exhausted after labour and delivery to feed the baby immediately. In reality, the surge of oxytocin that comes with skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding helps to calm a mother after the baby's birth.

It is also widely believed that Vitamin K and medication to prevent gonorrhoea eye infection must be given to an infant immediately after birth. The American

College of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine state that these important preventive measures can be delayed for as long as an hour until after the baby has breastfed, without risk to the infant.

Over-all, skin-to-skin contact and early feeds with colostrum are associated with reduced mortality in the first month of life. They are also associated with increased exclusive breastfeeding and longer duration of breastfeeding in the following months, leading to improved health and reduced mortality later on as well.