

## Editorial

# Empower Parents and Enable Breastfeeding

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## E D I T O R I A L

Breastfeeding is the best way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. With appropriate information about breastfeeding and support from family, friends and society, almost all mothers can effectively breastfeed. According to WHO, breastfeeding should be initiated within the first hour after birth. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended up to 6 months of age, with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods up to two years of age or beyond.

Breastfeeding promotes better health for both mothers and children. Exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months and continued breastfeeding until age 2 or longer strengthens the children's immune system, and provides protection from various diseases even in later years of life. Breastfeeding has several benefits for the maternal health as well, women who breastfeed reduce their risk of breast and ovarian cancers. As per statistics, increasing breastfeeding to nearly universal levels could save more than 800 000 lives every year, the majority being children under 6 months. It is estimated that increased breastfeeding could avert 20 000 maternal deaths each year due to breast cancer.

In order to highlight the importance and benefits of breastfeeding, the first week of August i.e. 1-7 August every year is marked as "**World Breastfeeding Week**". The theme of this year's (2019) World Breastfeeding Week is "**Empower Parents, Enable Breastfeeding**". With this theme, UNICEF and WHO are calling on governments and all employers to adopt family-friendly policies that support breastfeeding. Family-friendly policies - such as paid parental leave - enable breastfeeding and help parents nurture and bond with their children in early life, when it matters most. Family-friendly policies are particularly important for working parents which includes paid maternity leave, on returning to work provision of a safe, private and hygienic space for expressing and storing breast milk; and affordable childcare at or near her workplace. Further, provision of paid paternity leave allows fathers to bond with their babies and promotes gender-equality. These family-friendly policies improve the physical, mental and emotional health of the mother and baby and also enhance the overall family well-being.

Together, with everyone's support it is definitely possible to "*empower parents and enable breastfeeding*" for a healthy India.

Wish all the readers *Happy Reading!*