



The Use and Promotion of Breast-Milk Substitutes Position Statement

COPYRIGHT

All rights reserved.

Suggested Citation:

Council of International Neonatal Nurses, Inc. (COINN). (2024). The Use and Promotion of Breast-Milk Substitutes. Yardley, PA, USA: COINN.

©Council of International Neonatal Nurses, inc. (COINN)

COINN (Council of International Neonatal Nurses, Inc) acknowledges that limited resources and/or personnel may restrict opportunities to implement the recommendations and action points. To improve health outcomes, the global neonatal care community must strive to uphold these recommendations. This position statement is applicable to any healthcare professional caring for the small and sick newborns and their families.

SUMMARY

The Council of International Neonatal Nurses, Inc. (COINN) supports the aims of the World Health Organization (WHO) “International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes” (WHO, 1981) and the World Health Assembly resolutions to promote and protect breastfeeding as the best form of nutrition for all neonates, especially sick and/or premature neonates. This statement supports a safe use of breast milk substitutes when required.

BACKGROUND AND FACTORS

In the 1970s, there was global recognition that unregulated marketing and inappropriate use of breast-milk substitutes (e.g., formula) contributed to an alarming decline in breastfeeding and widespread malnutrition and mortality. In response, the International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes was adopted by the World Health Assembly.

All healthcare professionals must provide consistent, evidence-based advice and support to mothers and caregivers on the value of supplying breast-milk as the optimum nutrition for the neonate. There is a requirement to protect breastfeeding, but when breastfeeding is not possible or where breast-milk substitutes, fortifiers or supplemental feeding is indicated, mothers and caregivers should receive education on the proper use of the breast-milk substitutes available.

Healthcare professionals require up to evidence-based knowledge to meet their obligations and correctly advise and support parents and caregivers on infant nutritional alternatives.

With the increased use of digital platforms, inappropriate and misguided online content can influence the public and make people susceptible to harmful marketing practices (Ching et al., 2021). Aggressive marketing of breast-milk substitutes, bottles, and teats (pacifiers) can threaten the successful establishment of breastfeeding (Van Tulleken et al., 2020). Sponsorship by breast-milk substitute companies for healthcare professional education, scientific meetings and the supply of

promotional material is not encouraged by the WHO Code, The Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) nor the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE).

Having evidence-based knowledge supports healthcare professionals to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding and the use of human milk. This knowledge enables healthcare professional to give clear, consistent, and accurate information about the importance of breastmilk.

COINN RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION POINTS:

1. Educational opportunities should be provided for healthcare professionals caring for neonates regarding the importance of breastmilk, feeding techniques, and safe practices (including infection control) regarding breast-milk substitutes.
2. Competency assessments of the healthcare professional providing neonatal care should be undertaken to ensure safe use of breast-milk substitutes.
3. Parents and caregivers of neonates should be provided with education regarding the safe preparation and use of breast-milk substitutes (e.g., parent craft classes).
4. Clean areas should be available for the preparation of breast-milk substitutes to reduce the risk of infection and contamination.
5. Evidence-based protocols should be provided which include guidance regarding ordering/purchasing, storage, preparation, administration and disposal of breast-milk substitutes.
6. Acceptance of sponsorship through trade exhibition, financial support for education events, and/or the receiving of any nutritional alternatives or products (e.g., bottles) should only be accepted from companies that comply with the WHO Code and are products prescribed for medical indications.

REFERENCES

Australian College of Neonatal Nurses Inc. (2019) Breastfeeding and breast milk substitutes position statement. Retrieved from <https://www.acnn.org.au/about/position-statements/Position-statement-on-breastfeeding-and-breastmilk-substitutes.pdf>.

Ching, C., Zambrano, P., Nguyen, T. T., Tharaney, M., Zafimanjaka, M. G., & Mathisen, R. (2021). Old tricks, new opportunities: how companies violate the international code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes and Undermine Maternal and child health during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(5), 2381.

International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners. (2017) *Minimising commercial influence on education policy*. Retrieved from <https://iblce.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/minimising-commercial-influence-on-education-policy.pdf>.

New Zealand Nurses Organisation. (2019). Responsible income generation from sponsorship and advertising policy. Retrieved from <https://www.nzno.org.nz>.

The Perinatal Society of Australia & New Zealand. (PSANZ). (2017) *PSANZ policy on receiving sponsorship from companies marketing infant formula*. Retrieved from <https://www.psanz.com.au>.

van Tulleken, C., Wright, C., Brown, A., McCoy, D., & Costello, A. (2020). Marketing of breastmilk substitutes during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Lancet*, 396(10259).e58. doi: 10.1016/S 0140-6736(20)32119-X. Epub 2020 Oct 8. PMID: 33038948; PMCID: PMC7544448.

World Health Organization. (WHO). (1981). *International code of marketing of breast milk substitutes*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241541601>.

World Health Organization. (WHO). (2009). *Baby-friendly hospital initiative* Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241594950>.

Approved: COINN BOD: May, 2024