

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
Issued by: Department of Health
Date: Wednesday, 31 July 2024

Breastfeeding: A mother's gift for every child

Pretoria: Exclusive breastfeeding remains a cornerstone of child survival and child health because it provides essential, unique nutrition for a child's optimal growth and cognitive development. It also serves as a child's first immunization, providing protection from respiratory infections, diarrhoeal disease, and other potentially life-threatening diseases.

On the other hand, women who breastfeed have a reduced risk of developing chronic diseases such as breast and ovarian cancer, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes. The success or failure of breastfeeding should not be seen solely as the responsibility of the women as their ability to successfully breastfeed is shaped by the support and the environment in which they live.

The Department of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) will kick-off World Breastfeeding Awareness Week Thursday, 1 August under the global theme "**Closing the gap: Breastfeeding support for all.**" The theme aims to highlight a need to strengthen breastfeeding support in order to reduce inequalities and forms of discrimination that exist in our society with a special focus on breastfeeding in times of emergencies and crises.

World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated annually from 1 - 7 August to raise awareness about the significance of breastfeeding for the benefit of both child and the mother, and at the same time encourage to families, community and employers to support breastfeeding mothers by creating an enabling environment for them feed their babies, anywhere, anytime.

Breastfeeding mothers are often subjected to harassment and other forms of discrimination when they feed their babies in public places. The objectives for World Breastfeeding Week 2024 are to engage individuals and organisations to promote, protect and support breastfeeding. The campaign also seeks to galvanize action on reducing inequalities in breastfeeding support by focusing on vulnerable groups.

South has made progress in improving the rates of exclusive breastfeeding in children under 6 months up to 32% in 2016. The country has been committed to reach the global Sustainable Development Goals Nutrition target of increasing the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months up to at least 50% by 2025, despite the latest reported rate of 22.2% from the National Food and Nutrition Security Survey (NFNSS) report 2024.

As part of a series of breastfeeding awareness activities to commemorate World Breastfeeding Week, the Department will host webinars on the 1st and 6th August 2024.

Details of the webinars are as follows:

Date: Thursday, 1 August 2024

Time: 09h00 – 12h00

Link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8KmYVH8iRQeeI9IBUZm5cg

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