

At a glance: Indonesia

Breastfeeding saves lives after earthquake disaster



© UNICEF Indonesia/2006

In times of disaster, when clean water can be scarce, breastfeeding protects infants from disease.

By Jane O'Brien

In a developing country, a child who is breastfed is almost three times more likely to survive infancy than a child who is not breastfed. World Breastfeeding Week is observed in over 120 countries by UNICEF and its partners. The aim is to promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, which yields tremendous health benefits for children.

NEW YORK, USA, 31 July 2006 – Breastfeeding gives children the best start in life. It protects them from diseases such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections, and provides all the nutrients that newborns need to stay healthy and grow. If every child was exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life, an estimated 1.5 million young lives would be saved.

And in emergency situations, this is especially true.

When an earthquake struck Indonesia this May, hundreds of thousands of people were left homeless. Mothers struggled to feed their children and many were given supplies of formula milk. But as UNICEF's Emergency Nutrition Officer in Yogyakarta, Dorothy Foote, explains, that may have done more harm than good.

"The environment is dirty, it's dusty, and access to clean water is limited. Women's cooking facilities, where they would normally boil water and wash their dishes, are not available. People are cooking outside. Frequently people are eating from community kitchens, so there's a real loss of control over the cleanliness of the environment," she says. "It increases the likelihood that children will get sick from what they are consuming. And the switch to formula also reduces the amount of protection they get from the antibodies in the breast milk."



© UNICEF Indonesia/2006

Cleaning and cooking outside can increase the risk of infants consuming contaminated food and water if they are not being breastfed.

World Breastfeeding Week 2006 marks the 25th anniversary of the International Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes. It aims to protect and promote breastfeeding by prohibiting the advertising and aggressive marketing of substitutes.

At Bantul Hospital in central Java, UNICEF's Dr. Brian Sriprihastuti has seen the evidence of how it can be harmful to switch to formula milk, particularly during disasters. He says young babies are being admitted suffering from dehydration due to diarrhoea caused by a weakened immune system or from drinking formula mixed with contaminated water.

"UNICEF promotes giving breast milk [only] to children for the first six months of life because it has antibodies that help the immune system, and these cannot be found in infant formula," he says.

More than 80 per cent of affected households have received powder milk since the earthquake – double the normal consumption. Not only can that have an adverse effect on babies under six months old, it also has economic implications.

Ms. Foote says that many women cannot afford formula, but their children become dependent on supplies that have been donated.

“It will be more difficult for woman to revert back to breastfeeding,” she says. “It’s better that, instead of receiving formula, a woman is given encouragement to continue breastfeeding and receives extra food and water herself, so that she doesn’t worry about her breast milk drying up.

“So we want to be able to support young mothers to continue to breastfeed and understand that this is really the best thing that they could do for their baby in adverse circumstances.”

UNICEF has trained 100 women to be breastfeeding peer counsellors in an initiative to promote continued breastfeeding for children. They will visit mothers with infants who are particularly vulnerable to disease and will encourage all mothers to give their babies the best start to their new lives.

Video

25 July 2006:

Suzanne Dayne reports from Pongok village, Indonesia, where UNICEF is encouraging mothers to breastfeed their babies rather than feed them formula.



VIDEO [high](#)⁵ | [low](#)⁶

[Broadcast-quality video on demand from The Newsmarket](#)⁷

Audio

27 July 2006:

Sophie Boudre reports from Tegal Rejo village, Indonesia, where UNICEF is promoting continued breastfeeding



⁸ AUDIO [listen](#)⁹

World Breastfeeding Week

[In Burkina Faso, breastfeeding lowers infant mortality](#)¹⁰

[Baby pageant in Sierra Leone: A new strategy to encourage breastfeeding](#)¹¹

[Press release: World Breastfeeding Week](#)¹²

[Indonesia: Breastfeeding saves lives after earthquake](#)¹³

[Philippines: Mothers in Philippines break record for breastfeeding](#)¹⁴

[Progress for Children 2006: Exclusive Breastfeeding](#)¹⁵

The following external links open in a new window:

[World Breastfeeding Week](#)¹⁶

[World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action](#)

17

[UNICEF Innocenti Press Centre](#) 18

UNICEF radio



19

Links

1. <http://digg.com/submit>
2. <http://ma.gnolia.com/bookmarklet/add>
3. <http://del.icio.us/post>
4. http://www.unicef.org/sharetools_popup.html
5. http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/ramfiles/6411h_yogyakartabreastfeeding.ram
6. http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/ramfiles/6411l_yogyakartabreastfeeding.ram
7. <http://www.thenewsmarket.com/CustomLink/CustomLinks.aspx?GUID=94cfd5a-3af5-41cf-837b-f88e77e6c638>
8. http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/ramfiles/urp6243_iranfifayouth.ram
9. http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/ramfiles/urp6382_indonesiabreastfeeding.ram
10. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/burkinafaso_35227.html
11. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_35185.html
12. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_35142.html
13. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/indonesia_35137.html
14. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/philippines_33982.html
15. http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2006n4/index_breastfeeding.html
16. <http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>
17. <http://www.waba.org.my/>
18. <http://unicef-irc.org/presscentre/>
19. http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/video_radio.html