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'Breast is best' rules stay: Group*City News - March 09, 2007***The Jakarta Post, Jakarta**

A coalition of non-governmental organizations that promote breastfeeding has urged the central government to finish by the end of the month revising the draft regulations on the marketing of breast-milk substitutes.

The coalition, comprising Visi Anak Bangsa, the Kakak Foundation, the Indonesian Consumers Foundation, the Indonesian Lactation Center and the Agency for Increasing the Breast-milk Intake of Babies, had submitted the draft to the Health Ministry in 2005 for further discussion.

The draft was issued on March 6 after being reworked by the Justice and Human Rights Ministry so that it complemented existing health regulations.

The coalition was critical of the amendments, saying many parts of the draft had been cut or inappropriately reworded, including its title and the articles stipulating sanctions.

"We ask the government to revert to the version we submitted," said Agus Pambagio of Visi Anak Bangsa.

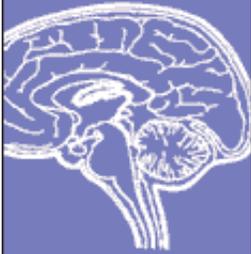
The coalition recommended the government form a supervisory body -- involving representatives from the Health Ministry, related NGOs and infant food producers -- to control the marketing of breast-milk substitutes and complementary foods in hospitals and other health centers.

It claimed that by using health centers to promote and distribute their products, infant formula companies had not only violated the World Health Organization's Code on the Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes but had given mothers the impression that infant formula was superior to breast milk.

"Many doctors at hospitals recommend the use of infant formula to the mothers of newborns or infants under the age of 6 months. This is not good for the babies," Agus said, adding that exclusive breastfeeding was recommended for the first six months of life.

According to WHO, a breast-milk substitute is any food being

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marketed or represented as a partial or total replacement for breast milk, while complementary food includes any food -- whether manufactured or locally prepared -- suitable as a complement to breast milk or to infant formula, when either becomes insufficient to satisfy the nutritional requirements of the infant. Such food is also commonly called "weaning food" or a "breast-milk supplement".

The coalition has for years been campaigning to communicate the health risks of not breastfeeding infants and recommends that mothers start breastfeeding within one hour of birth.

According to its data, one infant dies every seven minutes in the country, and breastfeeding is associated with a reduction in the risk of postneonatal death.

"We are not setting out to hurt the infant food business, we just want the government to manage and control marketing activities through the regulations," Agus said.

The draft of the regulations bans advertising infant formula as suitable for infants under the age of six months and states that the use of formula can hamper breast-milk digestion.

It also states that sanctions will be imposed on medical workers who tell mothers infant formula is superior to breast milk or to the formula companies, in the form of written warnings, media announcements, fines of up to Rp 1 billion or the revocation of licenses.

The coalition has urged the Association of Infant Food Producers to monitor the marketing of its products in supermarkets and other distribution outlets.

Hendro H. Poedjono, the association's secretary-general, said it was unfair to blame formula companies.

"Basically, we support the breastfeeding campaign. Breast-milk substitutes are only alternative foods that should be given to babies in particular cases, for example in the case of the onset of lactation being delayed for four days or more," he told *The Jakarta Post*.

He said the industries had a code of conduct that was based on the WHO code.

"However, we will adhere to the regulations and accept the imposition of sanctions." (04)

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