

## Breastfeeding Week to promote breastfeeding

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Breastfeeding Week is observed in the first week of August to focus attention on the important aspect of promotion and support of breastfeeding. The theme of this year's breastfeeding week is 'Sustaining Breastfeeding'. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has planned various activities at the national level during this week in association with IAP and Rammohan Lohia Hospital.

To intensify the efforts further for promotion of breastfeeding, the Health Ministry has initiated a nationwide programme called "MAA-Mother's Absolute Affection" to bring undiluted focus on promotion of breastfeeding and provision of services towards supporting breastfeeding, along with ongoing efforts of routine health systems. In addition, "National Guidelines on Lactation Management Centres in Public Health Facilities" have been recently released to facilitate establishment of lactation management centres for ensuring that the sick and pre-term babies are fed with safe human breast milk.

The key components of the MAA programme are awareness generation, promotion of breastfeeding & inter personal counselling at community level, skilled support for breastfeeding at delivery points and monitoring and Award/ recognition of health facility. Under this programme, ASHA has been incentivized for reaching out to pregnant and lactating mothers and provide information on benefits and techniques of successful breastfeeding during interpersonal communication. ANMs at all sub-centres and health personnel at all delivery points are being trained for providing skilled support to mothers referred with issues related to breastfeeding.

Under NHM, funding support has been recommended for all States and UTs (since 2016) for successful implementation of the MAA programme. 23 States have started implementing various activities under MAA programme such as one day sensitization of health staffs, convergence meetings with line departments, Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) training of staffs at health facilities, communication activities using mass media and mid-media etc. Around 2.5 lakhs ASHAs and 40,000 health staffs including programme managers at district and block level, doctors (MOs), staff nurses (SNs) and ANMs have been sensitized for breastfeeding promotion strategies under MAA programme and around 2800 health facility staffs (MOs, SNs and ANMs) are trained in 4 days IYCF training. In addition more than 75,000 mother's meetings were also carried out by ASHAs at village level to sensitize mothers regarding importance of appropriate breastfeeding practices.

Breastfeeding is an important efficient and cost-effective intervention promoting child survival and health. Breastfeeding within an hour of birth could prevent 20% of the newborn deaths. Infants who are not breastfed are 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia and 11 times more likely to die from diarrhoea than children who are exclusively breastfed, which are two leading causes of death in children under-five years of age. In addition, children who were not breastfed are at increased risk for diabetes, obesity, allergies, asthma, childhood leukemia, sudden infant death syndrome etc. Apart from mortality and morbidity benefits, breastfeeding also has tremendous

impact on improved IQ.

The trend of breastfeeding has shown an upward trend. As per recent data, initial breastfeeding has been nearly doubled in last decade. i.e from 23.4 per cent to 41.6 per cent (NFHS-3, 2005-06 and 4, 2015-16). Significant improvement has also been reported for exclusive breastfeeding as proportion of children under age 6 months exclusively breastfed, has gone up to 54.9 (NFHS-4) per cent from 46.4 per cent (NFHS-3). However, there is further scope of improving initial breastfeeding rates considering the high proportion of institutional deliveries in the country.

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MV/SK

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