



australian
breastfeeding
association

MEDIA RELEASE
20 March 2006

INFANT FEEDING IN EMERGENCIES

Breastfeeding the safest option

In emergencies, according to international relief agencies, women in displacement and emergency situations face increased risk of breastfeeding difficulties. It is important that support be available to these mothers. The Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline provides all mothers with reliable, consistent, accurate breastfeeding information and support. The Townsville helpline number is 47235566 or the Brisbane helpline can also be contacted on 38448977 or 38448166.

Breastfeeding women need assistance, not just general promotion because in emergencies many women get mixed or confused messages.

Some myths:

MYTH 1: "STRESS MAKES MILK DRY UP"

While extreme stress or fear may cause milk to momentarily stop flowing, this response, like many other physiological responses to anxiety is usually temporary. There is growing evidence that breastfeeding produces hormones that reduce tension, calm the mother and the baby and create a loving bond.

MYTH 2 "BABIES WITH DIARRHOEA NEED WATER OR TEA"

As breastmilk is 90% water, exclusively breastfeeding babies with diarrhoea do not usually need additional liquids such as glucose water or tea. Water is often contaminated in emergency situations. In the case of severe diarrhoea oral rehydration therapy (administered by cup) may be required.

MYTH 3 "ONCE BREASTFEEDING HAS STOPPED, IT CANNOT BE RESUMED"

With an adequate relactation technique and support, it is possible to help mothers and their babies to restart breastfeeding after they have switched to infant formula. This is sometimes vital in an emergency.

These websites provide information on protecting and supporting breastfeeding in emergencies:

- ❖ Australian Breastfeeding Association www.breastfeeding.asn.au -
- ❖ Information on Infant and Young Children feeding in emergencies (Unicef)
<http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/Issue-Papers/Emergency.pdf>
- ❖ Guidelines for relief workers <http://www.enonline.net/ife/ifeops.html>
- ❖ World Health Organisation – emergency guidelines
http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/Emergencies/IYCF_emergencies.htm

Contact **Merewyn Janson, Branch Public Relations Officer**
38140535 or 04 1487 4083