

Extension of statutory maternity leave to 14 weeks to help encourage working women to breastfeed

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, welcomed the passage of the Employment (Amendment) Bill 2019 (the Amendment Bill) by the Legislative Council today (July 9). The Amendment Bill will increase statutory maternity leave from 10 weeks to 14 weeks, which will support and encourage working women to adopt breastfeeding for a longer period of time and thus improve the health and development of their children.

Professor Chan said, "Breastfeeding brings immediate and long-term benefits to both mothers and babies. The World Health Organization recommends exclusively breastfeeding babies up to about 6 months of age and gradually introducing appropriate solid food while continuing breastfeeding until 2 years old or beyond. Such benefits from breastfeeding are proportional to duration and exclusiveness."

The Government has all along endeavoured to promote, protect and support breastfeeding. In 2014, the Food and Health Bureau set up a Committee on Promotion of Breastfeeding, chaired by the Under Secretary for Food and Health, to provide specific recommendations on strategies and action plans to strengthen the promotion, protection and support for breastfeeding. Its objective is to enhance the sustainability of breastfeeding and promote breastfeeding as a norm for baby care widely accepted by the general public.

The Department of Health (DH) will continue to promote and protect breastfeeding through a multi-pronged approach, including strengthening publicity and education on breastfeeding; encouraging the adoption of the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace policy to support working mothers to continue breastfeeding after returning to work; encouraging public places to become Breastfeeding Friendly Premises so that the breastfeeding mothers can breastfeed their children or express milk anytime; imposing a mandatory requirement for the provision of baby care rooms and lactation rooms in the sale conditions of government land sale sites for new commercial premises; promulgating guidelines on the provision of baby care rooms and lactation rooms in suitable new government premises; implementing the voluntary Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Formula Milk and Related Products, and Food Products for Infants & Young Children; and strengthening surveillance on the local breastfeeding situation.

More information is available at the DH's Family Health Service designated webpage on breastfeeding (www.fhs.gov.hk/english/breastfeeding/).